

## **TRAIL NETWORK IMPROVEMENT GRANTS**

**Recommended Actions:** Adopt Resolutions 25-09-02.1 and 25-09-02.2 authorizing Proposition 68 funding for the following grants:

1. Resolution 25-09-02.1 (Attachment 1) authorizing a grant of up to \$115,000 to the Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association (TAMBA) to complete dirt trail improvements on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin).
2. Resolution 25-09-02.2 (Attachment 2) authorizing a grant of up to \$115,000 to the Tahoe Rim Trail Association (TRTA) to complete improvements on the Tahoe Rim Trail and associated connecting dirt trails on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

**Executive Summary:** The recommended actions authorize implementation grants to TAMBA and the TRTA for multiple-use dirt trail enhancements that improve environmental conditions and visitor experience. TAMBA and the TRTA will hire trail crews to complete trail improvements on up to 40 miles of USDA Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) dirt trails on the California side of the Basin during the 2026 and 2027 summer seasons. TAMBA and the TRTA often rely on volunteers for general trail maintenance, but in this case the organizations need more specific expertise, therefore they will hire dedicated crews with experience in constructing and enhancing complex trail features. The trail crews will build erosion control features, clear overgrowth in burn areas, and improve trail width, tread, and wayfinding to reduce user-created trails. These trail improvements will create long-term solutions for erosion control and improve environmental sustainability on Basin trails.

Funding for the grants comes from Proposition 68, the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018. The grants advance both the Tahoe Regional Trails Strategy and the California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) Strategic Plan Goals to Provide Recreational Opportunities and Access for All and Care for the Basin's Natural, Tribal, and Cultural Resources. Upon Board authorization, Conservancy staff will work with TAMBA and the TRTA to execute two grant agreements. The two organizations will work together to implement trail improvement projects funded by the grants.

**Location:** TAMBA and the TRTA will implement trail improvements on up to 40 miles of trails on LTBMU lands throughout the California side of the Basin. Attachments 3a, 3b, and 3c identify specific LTBMU-managed trails on the south, west, and north of the California side of the Basin—including segments of the Tahoe Rim Trail and other heavily used trails—that the TRTA and TAMBA may prioritize for work under the proposed grants. The maps also show other trails in the Basin, including paved trails, to highlight overall trail connectivity and the extent of the multi-use network.

**Fiscal Summary:** Combined, the two grants will allocate up to \$230,000 from Proposition 68.

## Overview

### History

The public use the Basin’s extensive network of dirt trails for a wide variety of purposes, including hiking, biking, running, walking, birdwatching, and camping. The TRTA and TAMBA play a major role in building, maintaining, and improving trails in the Basin. As partners to the LTBMU, these organizations add much-needed capacity to build and maintain Basin trails on LTBMU lands. Their support helps ensure trail systems meet the USDA Forest Service’s sustainable trail standards.

The TRTA, established in 1982, envisioned a continuous trail that would encircle Lake Tahoe. With permission from the LTBMU, the TRTA designed and built the trail with a volunteer workforce. This community-driven trail project was finished after 20 years and over 200,000 volunteer hours. Today, through a volunteer service agreement with the LTBMU, the TRTA continues to maintain and improve the 170-mile Tahoe Rim Trail and about 30 miles of trails that connect trailheads and neighborhoods to the Tahoe Rim Trail. The TRTA also runs several educational and access programs designed to teach people about the region’s natural resources and expand access to the trail network for underrepresented communities.

Established in 1988, TAMBA is dedicated to the stewardship of sustainable, multiple-use trails and to preserving access for mountain bikers through advocacy, education and promotion of responsible trail use. Today, through agreements with the LTBMU and other public land managers, TAMBA helps maintain and improve over 100 miles of multiple-use dirt trails per year.

For many years, TAMBA and the TRTA were able to build, maintain, and improve the Basin’s trail network with a largely volunteer workforce. However, during the last decade, use of the region’s trail network has increased considerably. The TRTA has

recorded a steady increase in trail use on the Tahoe Rim Trail and the major connecting trails, from 400,000 trail users in 2016 to 700,000 trail users in 2022. The increase in use is degrading trail quality, safety, and sustainability, creating a need for trail crews to build more durable and erosion-resistant trail features that can withstand heavy use.

The TRTA and TAMBA have partnered with the LTBMU to coordinate trail improvements that address the environmental impacts of increased visitor use and improve the visitor experience on hundreds of miles of Basin trails. The LTBMU has two maintenance crews that are responsible for general maintenance across LTBMU recreation sites, hazard tree removal at recreation sites and near trails, response to fires, and coordination with the TRTA and TAMBA. The LTBMU lacks a dedicated trail maintenance staff, and volunteer service agreements allow TAMBA and the TRTA to provide long-term support to maintain and improve trails in the Basin. The LTBMU provides in-kind support for TAMBA and TRTA trail improvement projects, including hosting trail crew training and certifying TRTA and TAMBA crews. TAMBA and the TRTA are responsible for obtaining funding to hire, train, and execute trail maintenance in close coordination with the LTBMU.

### **Detailed Description of Recommended Actions**

#### **1. Major elements of recommended actions**

The TRTA and TAMBA seek \$115,000 each in Proposition 68 funds to improve existing dirt trails on the California side of the Basin. The two organizations will partner and leverage each organization's capacity and skills to complete the work. This collaboration includes co-hosting trainings, holding monthly coordination meetings, and sharing crew members trained to safely operate chainsaws. They also partner on specific trail projects and on community volunteer trail work days. Trail improvements will include building erosion control features (e.g., rock walls, armored drainages, and stream crossings), clearing overgrowth in burn areas, and improving trail width, tread, and wayfinding to reduce user-created trails.

The grants will help fund trail crew labor, TRTA and TAMBA staff time, and materials support. All trails are located on LTBMU lands in California. The TRTA and TAMBA will hire seasonal crews to complete 20 weeks (780 hours) of trail improvement work, improving sustainability on up to 40 miles of Basin trails during the summers of 2026 and 2027. During the field seasons, TAMBA and the TRTA will provide entry-level crew members with opportunities for skill development in land management and trail maintenance.

## 2. Benefits of the recommended actions

Trail improvements help avoid the environmental impacts of increased trail use, improve the visitor experience, and maintain safety. Without proper trail management, increased recreation on Basin trails has a direct negative impact on the health of the Basin's forests and watersheds. Activities funded by the grants include trail improvements such as armoring the trail with rocks and building retaining walls to clearly define the route and prevent erosion. These improvements help avoid problems associated with heavy trail traffic, such as people "cutting" switchbacks, creating informal trails that more directly connect two points of the main trail. Such shortcuts cause soil erosion, damage the main trail, and contribute to water quality problems.

This funding supports the TRTA's and TAMBA's building of durable trail features that will reduce the need for annual maintenance, protect natural resources, and improve the visitor experience. When maintained, these improvements can remain effective for 20 to 100 years.

## 3. Schedule of recommended actions

- In November 2025, TAMBA and the TRTA will evaluate the completed 2025 trail improvements, assess how well they have held up, and use the results to determine priorities for the 2026 field season.
- In early 2026 to October 2026, TAMBA and the TRTA will hire and train seasonal trail crews and improve up to 20 miles of trail.
- In November/December 2026, TAMBA and the TRTA will develop priorities for the 2027 trail improvements.
- In early 2027 to October 2027, TAMBA and the TRTA will hire and train seasonal trail crews and improve up to 20 miles of trail.
- The activities funded by the Conservancy grants will end at the end of the trail crew season in November 2027.

## **Financing**

Upon approval, staff will enter into grant agreements with TAMBA and the TRTA for up to \$115,000 each. TAMBA and the TRTA are requesting a total of \$230,000 from the Conservancy, half of the total funding need. Matching funds will be provided by memberships and donations to each organization, and additional grant funding from other organizations. Matching grant funds are not yet secured but have supported TAMBA's and the TRTA's work previously.

## **Authority**

### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation**

The recommended actions are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. Specifically, Government Code section 66907.7 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations for purposes consistent with its mission.

### **Consistency with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan**

The recommended actions advance the Conservancy's Strategic Plan Goals:

- Provide Recreational Opportunities and Access for All (Strategies 1, 2, and 3), by leveraging partnerships to improve environmentally sustainable trail networks on public lands to meet the increasing demand of recreational trail use; and
- Care for the Basin's Natural, Tribal, and Cultural Resources (Strategy 3), by enhancing partnerships to protect Basin forests and watersheds through the stewardship and maintenance of sustainable trail systems.

### **Consistency with External Authorities**

The recommended actions support multiple Tahoe Regional Trails Strategy goals, including:

- Tahoe trails should be environmentally sustainable. This goal prioritizes the improvement and maintenance of existing trails before building new trails and the minimization of user-created trails.
- Ensure the long-term feasibility and sustainability of the region's trail systems through ongoing coordination and partnership among Basin trail partners, and leveraging funding among agencies and organizations by coordinating grant opportunities.

These actions also support the Lake Tahoe Destination Stewardship Plan by reducing peak demand impacts through infrastructure improvements that enhance and better manage the visitor experience, and by developing sustainable recreation projects under the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP).

These actions advance two EIP projects (project numbers 01.01.01.0072 and 03.02.02.0100) focused on implementing trail improvements and trail maintenance to protect natural resources on LTBMU and other public lands in partnership with the TRTA and TAMBA.

## **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15000 et seq.), certain classes of activities are statutorily and categorically exempt from CEQA or are exempt because they have been determined by the Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency to have no significant effect on the environment. Pursuant to Public Resources Code sections 21001(f) and 21082, the Conservancy has also adopted regulations to implement, interpret, and make specific the provisions of CEQA. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 12100 et seq.)

The TRTA and TAMBA intend to partner and leverage each organization's capacity and skills to complete trail improvement work under the proposed grants. Accordingly, staff has evaluated the recommended actions as a single project for the purposes of CEQA and found it to be exempt. The project qualifies for a categorical exemption under CEQA Guidelines section 15301, Existing Facilities, and the Conservancy's CEQA regulations, section 12102.1, because it involves repairs and minor alterations to existing trails, such as improving trail width, tread, and wayfinding, with negligible or no expansion of their existing use. It is also categorically exempt under CEQA Guidelines section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, and the Conservancy's CEQA regulations, section 12102.3, because it involves the construction of small structures or facilities serving public recreational and erosion control purposes, such as rock walls, armored drainages, and stream crossings. Staff has prepared a notice of exemption (NOE) (Attachment 4). If the Board approves the recommended actions, staff will file the NOE with the State Clearinghouse pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, section 15062.

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Resolution 25-09-02.1  
Attachment 2 – Resolution 25-09-02.2  
Attachment 3a – Trail Network Improvement Grants South Shore  
Attachment 3b – Trail Network Improvement Grants West Shore  
Attachment 3c – Trail Network Improvement Grants North Shore  
Attachment 4 – Conservancy Notice of Exemption  
Exhibit A – Location Maps

### **Conservancy Staff Contact**

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