

UPPER TRUCKEE MARSH SOUTH PROJECT UPDATE

In March 2024, the California Tahoe Conservancy (Conservancy) acquired the Upper Truckee Marsh South property (formerly known as the Knox Johnson and Motel 6 property), connecting public lands along the Upper Truckee River (River). The acquisition includes the four-acre former motel and restaurant site, 25 acres of wetland, 1,500 feet of River corridor, and two acres of upland with a residential structure (Ponderosa site) (Attachment 1). The Conservancy acquired the property to protect and restore critical wetland and meadow habitats, including the former Motel 6 site, which is in one of two Special Stream Restoration Plan Areas per the Lake Tahoe Regional Plan and described more below. The acquisition also presents opportunities to enhance public access. A critical and heavily used segment of the South Tahoe Bikeway (Bikeway) crosses the River and traverses the property. The acquisition is in the heart of South Lake Tahoe and near several residential neighborhoods.

This Conservancy property presents a great opportunity to continue restoring the River and Upper Truckee Marsh (Marsh) and improving public access. Last year, staff began planning the Upper Truckee Marsh South Project (Project). The Project area includes the new acquisition and adjacent existing Conservancy wetlands in the southern Marsh. The Conservancy is exploring ideas for wetland restoration, public access improvements, and vegetation management.

Summary of Public Outreach Efforts

During the last year, staff conducted two rounds of broad public outreach. The first round of engagement sought to solicit Project ideas and comments from partners and the public. The second round of engagement sought comments on an array of Project concepts for restoration, public access, and vegetation management. Staff engaged with the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe Tribe), the City of South Lake Tahoe, and other Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) partners. Several in-person events, including public workshops, meetings with community-based organizations, site walks with the public, and tabling at community events, provided opportunities for broad public input. Outreach also included a virtual public meeting and two bilingual online public surveys.

The Conservancy's goal for this outreach effort was to hear from Basin residents and visitors, including people from diverse sectors of the community. The online survey respondents came from varying demographics, and the Conservancy made additional targeted efforts to hear from underserved communities and Californians who are not residents of the Basin. The

Conservancy, and partners such as other state conservancies and Keep Tahoe Blue, advertised widely on social media to share information on the Project, story map, and survey—inside and outside of the Basin. These efforts have resulted in thousands of views and hundreds of participants in online surveys. Staff attended the Washoe Tribe’s Earth Day event to hear from Tribal members, including youth and elders. Staff also held individual meetings and workshops with organizations representing Hispanic and Latino community members, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Responses to the public and partner outreach provided numerous ideas, opportunities, perspectives, and concerns. Major themes from the outreach indicate:

- Significant support for prioritizing River and wildlife health, restoration, and scenic quality.
- The importance of the Bikeway through the property, and ideas to improve it as part of the Project.
- Mixed interest in recreation improvements such as a picnic area, restroom, and pocket park. The community was generally supportive of these concepts, but nearby residents and property owners voiced various issues of concern.
- Strong support for improving River access while stabilizing riverbanks.
- Conflicting perspectives on the appropriateness of parking at the site. During the second round of public input, comments regarding parking were primarily focused on the Ponderosa Site (the two-acre upland area on the east side of the Project area). People expressed concerns about the current on-street parking bordering the Ponderosa Site causing erosion and overcrowding, especially for several weeks during rafting season when the site is heavily used as a raft take-out location. Other comments oppose formalizing parking in this area due to concerns about changing the neighborhood character, impacts to the natural setting, and people using parking to access nearby businesses.
- Interest in accessibility improvements for people with disabilities, including to trails, River access, and shaded rest areas.
- Public safety concerns related to illegal camping, wildfire, flooding, and Bikeway user conflicts.
- Ideas for aesthetic improvements, wayfinding signage, and interpretive exhibits about natural resources and Tribal stewardship.
- General enthusiasm for the Project, and appreciation for the Conservancy soliciting public input.

Staff is incorporating feedback to further develop Project concepts for additional Board, partner, and public review. Important considerations include the purpose of acquisition, as described above; the planning context and allowable uses, as described below; how people want to interact with the site; and the necessary access for those uses.

Later in 2026, the Conservancy plans to initiate environmental review, which will include a preferred Project and additional opportunities for feedback. The Conservancy will continue to hear from all sectors of the community and visitors, along with key partners such as the Washoe Tribe and others.

Other Planning Considerations

The Lake Tahoe Regional Plan, which the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) updated in 2012, establishes Basinwide goals and policies to protect and restore environmental resources while balancing community development within the Basin. These goals and policies are implemented at the local level through the adoption of Area Plans and Plan Area Statements (PAS), which reflect local community vision while advancing the broader objectives of the Regional Plan. The former Motel 6 site is located within the Tahoe Valley Area Plan (TVAP) and the rest of the Project area including the Ponderosa site (Attachment 1) is in PAS 100, Truckee Marsh.

In developing the Project, staff is actively coordinating with local and regional public agencies to consider applicable Regional Plan, Area Plan, and PAS goals and policies to guide project design and implementation. Although the former Motel 6 site is located within the TVAP, it is also subject to additional consideration under a TRPA Special Planning District, as the Regional Plan identifies it as one of only two Stream Restoration Plan Areas in the Basin (Attachment 1). This designation requires the applicable local government and property owners to develop an individual Restoration Plan. The Upper Truckee Marsh South property is located within PAS 100, which designates the Upper Truckee Marsh area for Conservation use, limiting permissible uses to protect and restore sensitive natural resources and support dispersed recreation such as hiking trails and cross-country skiing.

Together, these planning policies and designations provide the framework for evaluating project design and restoration opportunities in a manner that supports both regional and local objectives and long-term environmental protection.

Attachment

Attachment 1 - Project Map

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