

Executive Director's Report

As we meet on the cusp of summer, we look back on yet another unusual winter and spring. Much of California is in abnormally dry or moderate drought condition; despite the April storms, this includes the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin). The Sierra Nevada's meager snowpack raises concerns about wildfire risk for our communities and landscapes. In May, CAL FIRE Chief Joe Tyler, noted that the statewide acreage burned to date for the year is twice as high as our five-year average. Climate change amplifies wildfire risk, a trend that will continue. Chief Tyler expects California to have elevated fire potential throughout the summer.

Fortunately, the State is responding with further investment in projects to reduce fuels, and tools to speed up fuels reduction work. This includes 385 wildfire resilience projects statewide, including four Conservancy projects, that received fast-tracked approvals while maintaining environmental protections. The Conservancy's community forestry team has been hard at work all spring, implementing projects that are reducing wildfire risk for Basin residents and visitors. As we continue our work to enhance the Basin's climate resilience, including wildfire resilience, we also examine our contributions to global warming. Our agenda for this meeting includes an update on carbon emissions associated with Conservancy projects and operations. We look forward to a robust discussion on how we can combat climate change at the same time we adapt our management to address climate impacts.

Jason Vasques, Executive Director
California Tahoe Conservancy

Program Updates

1. Land Management

Land Management Projects

The Land Management Program is implementing small-scale projects on Conservancy land with seasonal Tahoe Resource Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) crews. Projects include restoring sensitive lands, protecting water quality, maintaining properties and facilities, reducing fuel hazards, and resolving encroachments.

Facilities Management

The Conservancy opened the entrance gates to Van Sickle Bi-State Park on May 1, and opened Tahoe Pines early, April 8, due to the early snow melt.

2. Tahoe Livable Communities

Property Acquisitions and Exchanges

The staff continues identifying and completing property acquisitions. This includes exploring acquisition opportunities, ordering appraisals, completing internal program reviews, lining up funding, teeing up Board approvals, and working with the Department of General Services to meet state acquisition requirements.

The staff is working on separate land exchanges with El Dorado County (County) and North Tahoe Public Utility District (NTPUD). The Conservancy's Land Transfer Guidelines establish the general criteria for staff and Board consideration of all land transfers. Transfer of Conservancy land must be consistent with the Conservancy's mission, guidelines, enabling legislation, and the purpose and funding source of the original acquisition. In addition, government-to-government transfers are intended to improve management efficiencies and support the delivery of public services, among other objectives. In general, the Conservancy seeks equal or greater value received whether it is in acreage, ecological, or monetary value.

The County land exchange will improve long-term land management, providing efficiencies and advancing public benefits. Under the proposed exchange, the Conservancy would exchange six asset land parcels located in the unincorporated community of Meyers in the County for five County parcels that support wildlife habitat and connectivity, water quality protection, and ecosystem and forest health. This exchange is to support the future implementation of the Tahoe El Dorado Area Plan and facilitate the development of a watercraft inspection station led by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) and the County. On May 4, 2026, the County, TRPA, Tahoe RCD, and Conservancy held a community meeting to highlight and answer questions on the development of a Watercraft Inspection Station. The Watercraft Inspection Station is part of the Lake Tahoe Watercraft Inspection program, which helps protect Lake Tahoe's ecosystem by preventing aquatic invasive species from entering or spreading in the Lake.

The NTPUD land exchange will improve management efficiencies and advance public benefits. Under the proposed exchange, the Conservancy would exchange a parcel located near Lake Tahoe on Secline Street in Placer County. The parcel currently provides passive recreation opportunities and is adjacent to Placer County and NTPUD parcels. The exchange of the Secline parcel to NTPUD is to support the future development of recreational and public access improvements.

In exchange, the Conservancy would receive one parcel that supports wildlife habitat and connectivity, water quality protection, and ecosystem and forest health.

Conservancy staff anticipates seeking Board approval for the El Dorado County exchange in September 2026, and for the NTPUD exchange in September or December 2026.

Land Bank

The Conservancy banks and transfers development rights and land coverage for affordable housing, town center, and other infill projects in the City of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado and Placer Counties. 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 recreation, housing, and other area plan goals.

In May, the Conservancy listed new development rights for sale on its website, available to the public on a first-come, first-served basis to meet permit requirements for projects outside of town centers. The available development rights include Residential Units of Use and Potential Residential Units of Use. The staff coordinated closely with the TRPA to ensure alignment with Lake Tahoe Regional Plan goals and the memorandum of understanding that created the land bank.

3. Recreation and Public Access

Accessibility Improvements at Patton Landing and North Tahoe Beaches

Conservancy staff is planning accessibility improvements at Patton Landing Beach (Carnelian Bay) and North Tahoe Beach (Kings Beach) to improve facility and lake access for people with disabilities. The staff expects the Conservancy will construct the two projects in 2027. The Conservancy is working with a concessionaire at Patton Landing Beach to address expected construction impacts on their café and nonmotorized watercraft rental business.

Land Management Strategies Planning

The staff is working with Ascent Environmental to facilitate an internal visioning process to define the goals, objectives, and guiding principles of the Conservancy's Land Management Strategy. This planning effort also includes developing a community engagement plan, refining a sequenced process for completing the Land Management Strategy, and conducting technical studies to support rulemaking and land use planning. The staff plans to engage the Board to collect input this fall. The staff expects the current planning phase to conclude in spring 2027.

4. Community Forestry

Ongoing Community Protection Projects

The Conservancy recently resumed several forestry projects that had been paused for the winter. These include the 33-acre Lyons Ranch hand thin near Lake Tahoe Airport, the 536-

parcel North Upper Truckee project on the south shore, and the 400-parcel Placer County South project on the west shore.

New Community Protection Project

The Conservancy started implementing the Tahoma Urban project in April, which includes nearly 150 public properties in El Dorado County. This is a multiple-ownership effort consisting of 118 Conservancy properties, seven National Forest Lands properties, and 23 El Dorado County properties.

Upcoming Mechanical Community Protection Projects

The staff is actively preparing for fall implementation at two larger-acreage project areas. Conservancy contractors will reduce fuels on 99 acres of state land as part of the Lyons Ranch Project mechanical project in the south shore. The staff also plans to hire contractors to complete the Dollar Mastication Project, which includes 320 acres of Conservancy land and 100 acres of Placer County land in the north shore.

5. Landscape Resilience

Lake Tahoe Basin Unified Risk Reduction

The Conservancy is awarding an \$85,000 Proposition 4 grant to Tahoe RCD to coordinate with Fire Aside throughout the Basin. Fire Aside is a wildfire resilience data collection platform that fire agencies use to evaluate defensible space, home hardening, and structure-level wildfire risk on private parcels. All Tahoe fire protection districts will use this platform, and the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team will coordinate Basinwide data. Partners will use Fire Aside and associated data, along with recently developed Community Wildfire Protection Plans, to prioritize mitigation, plan long-term projects and funding strategies, and provide consistent public engagement for wildfire risk reduction. This grant advances the Conservancy's Forestry Program Guidelines by supporting new technologies and approaches to protect communities from wildfire.

Meadow Monitoring

The Institute for Bird Populations (IBP) recently completed work funded by a four-year Conservancy grant to monitor riparian birds and bumble bee abundance and composition. The IBP completed monitoring in meadow systems throughout the Upper Truckee River and nearby tributaries to provide pre- and post-restoration project data. The IBP recently submitted its final report, including data that will inform managers performing meadow restoration on how to support biodiversity and habitat function.

6. Watershed Restoration and Water Quality

Conservancy staff continues to lead the partnership to restore the Upper Truckee River Watershed. In April, leadership from the Conservancy, Tahoe RCD, Tahoe Fund, and Keep Tahoe Blue hosted a field tour with representatives from the California Wildlife

Conservation Board and California Department of Fish and Wildlife. During this field tour, partners discussed funding strategies and coordination necessary to complete all large-scale restoration projects along the Upper Truckee River. Conservancy employees also lead the Upper Truckee River Watershed Advisory Group and are pursuing opportunities with the Tahoe Science Advisory Council to ensure Basin partners are applying the best available science in restoring the watershed.

7. Budget, Accounting, and Administration

In January, Governor Gavin Newsom proposed a budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026/27 that included Conservancy state operations, local assistance, and capital outlay project funding. In May, the Governor revised the proposed budget. State operations include personnel, vehicles, building rent, utilities, and work on Conservancy land. Local assistance is funding for Conservancy grants to partners. Capital outlay projects are multi-year, large-scale capital improvement projects on Conservancy land.

State Operations

Subject to the enactment of the Budget Act of 2026, the Governor's budget includes funding for state operations. Conservancy support costs for FY 2026/27 are estimated at approximately \$18.5 million. That amount includes approximately \$9 million in salaries, \$5 million in forestry contracting, \$4.5 million in operational costs (rent, utilities, fleet vehicle operations, insurance, transcriptions services, departmental costs, etc.).

Support cost funding comes from a variety of sources including bonds, statewide and Tahoe-specific special funds, and grants. The Conservancy annually receives a base amount of funding from the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF), which the California Natural Resources Agency manages, to cover a portion of the Conservancy's operating costs. The Governor's budget includes \$4.6 million of ELPF funds. The budget also includes \$5 million in reimbursement authority (i.e., authority to expend incoming state and federal grants) for Conservancy projects. The Conservancy also requests or receives annual amounts from several other special funds and bond appropriations to cover the remaining state operations costs, some of which may be multi-year appropriations.

Local Assistance

The Conservancy also requests annual appropriations for grants to partners from special funds and bonds. The Governor's budget includes \$450,000 from special funds, including Senate Bill 630 (2013) and Lake Tahoe License Plate, to support partner grants. As noted below, the Conservancy also uses carry over funding for grants to partners.

Capital Outlay Projects

The Conservancy submits requests for specific capital outlay project appropriations, mostly from bond funds but also from special funds. Specific line items in the Governor's budget include:

- \$500,000 for small restoration projects on Conservancy land;
- \$300,000 for feasibility and conceptual planning for new watershed and recreation projects on Conservancy land;
- \$600,000 for preliminary plans for the Dennis T. Machida Memorial Greenway – Van Sickle Connector shared-use trail;
- \$1 million for working drawings for the Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvement Project; and
- \$6 million for acquisitions of environmentally sensitive or significant resource areas; and
- \$500,000 for sidewalk accessibility improvements along Lake Tahoe Boulevard; and
- \$500,000 to study improvements for the Upper Truckee Marsh South restoration.

The Administration considers Conservancy budget requests relative to the statewide budget. Such budget requests are confidential until the Administration releases them as part of the annual budget process.

Additionally, in FY 2025/26 (the current FY), the Conservancy received a portion of the total Conservancy-allocated Climate Bond (Proposition 4) funding, which is \$29 million to reduce climate change impacts and increase public access and \$25.5 million for watershed and forest health improvement, biomass utilization, and workforce development. The Conservancy can use these funds for Conservancy operations and projects and partner grants. The Conservancy received approximately \$5 million for climate change and public access and approximately \$23.5 million of “Early Action” funds for watershed and forest health. The Conservancy can carry over these appropriations into future fiscal years.