From: Mertens, Chris@Tahoe
To:
Cc: Cecchi, Scott@Tahoe
Subject: FW: Concerns Regarding Tree Removal Practices and Request for Clarification — Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project
Date: Monday, June 1, 2026 11:07:45 AM

Good Morning Hannah,

Thanks for your comment about tree removal at Van Sickle. As you noted in your email below, your comment came in after the public comment deadline for the Supplemental IS/MND and, as a result, your comment has not been included in the Response to Comments, required under CEQA. However, we would like to provide more information to address your questions and your comment will be provided to our Board of Directors:

- Most of the tree removal associated with the Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvement Project is within the footprint of the proposed new shared-use trail.
- Tree removal on 029-441-03 is mentioned in the Supplemental IS/MND because it is a property the Conservancy recently acquired. Treatment prescriptions for that parcel, and all other Conservancy-owned parcels, will be consistent with our Forestry Program Guidelines (9_Forestry-Program-Guidelines_Att2_Guidelines.pdf).
- Our Board of Directors will consider adopting the Supplemental IS/MND at our Board meeting on June 18. Information and materials will be posted on our website 10 days prior to the meeting, here: Board Meetings & Agendas | Tahoe Conservancy

We appreciate your attention to this important project.

Best,
Chris

Chris Mertens (he/him) | Recreation and Public Access Program Supervisor
California Tahoe Conservancy
1061 3rd St, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
(530) 307-9235
tahoe.ca.gov

From: Cecchi, Scott@Tahoe
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2026 5:20 PM
To: 'Hannah Lingley' < >
Subject: RE: Concerns Regarding Tree Removal Practices and Request for Clarification — Van Sickle

Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project

Hello Hannah,

Thank you for your thoughtful comments. The Conservancy is very interested in completing the best projects we can and input like yours helps us think things through. There are so many considerations to try and align.

I shared your email with some of my colleagues, and we will compile additional information to answer your questions the best we can at this early stage in the planning process. It will take us some time and effort to do this well. Some of the information you seek will be available in about a month (in draft form). Other details will be flushed out next year during the formal project engineering process with the regulatory agencies that will be permitting this project. Stakeholders like Keep Tahoe Blue are engaged in this planning process as well. We anticipate constructing the project in 2028/2029.

Thanks again,
Scott

Scott Cecchi
Project Manager
Resources and Public Access Program
California Tahoe Conservancy
1061 3rd Street
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150
(530) 208-8323

From: Hannah Lingley < >
Sent: Saturday, May 16, 2026 12:54 AM
To: Cecchi, Scott@Tahoe <Scott.Cecchi@tahoe.ca.gov>
Cc: TAHOE Info <TAHOE.Info@tahoe.ca.gov>; info@keeptahoeblue.org; media@keeptahoeblue.org
Subject: Concerns Regarding Tree Removal Practices and Request for Clarification — Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project

Scott Cecchi, Associate Environmental Planner

California Tahoe Conservancy

1061 Third Street
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

Submitted via email: Scott.Cecchi@tahoe.ca.gov

Re: Concerns Regarding Tree Removal Practices and Request for Clarification — Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project

Dear Mr. Cecchi,

I am writing as a concerned member of the public regarding the Van Sickle Bi-State Park Safety and Equitable Access Improvements Project. I recognize that the formal public comment period for the Draft Supplemental Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration/Initial Environmental Checklist closed on April 27, 2026, but I respectfully ask that the following concerns be considered as the Conservancy moves toward project adoption and implementation.

My concern centers on tree removal practices in fuels reduction and forest health projects throughout the Tahoe Basin, and how those practices will be applied at Van Sickle. Specifically, I am concerned about projects that remove larger-diameter trees while retaining smaller understory trees — a pattern that runs counter to the prevailing scientific consensus on fire-resilient forest restoration.

Scientific Basis for Concern

A substantial body of peer-reviewed research and federal agency science supports retaining large-diameter, fire-resistant trees as the foundation of fuels reduction and forest restoration in Sierra Nevada mixed-conifer forests. Larger trees with thick bark, high crown base heights, and self-pruned lower branches are the most likely to survive wildfire and to serve as seed sources for forest recovery. Removing them undermines the long-term resilience objectives that fuels reduction projects are intended to achieve.

Key findings from the scientific literature include:

- **Restoration thinning should preserve large, healthy trees.** A 20-year experimental study at UC Berkeley's Blodgett Forest Research Station, led by fire scientist Scott Stephens, concluded that the goal of restoration thinning is to remove excess understory vegetation while preserving large, healthy trees. Treated plots showed an 80% likelihood that at least 80% of trees would survive a subsequent wildfire (Stephens et al., reported in Berkeley News, 2023).
- **Effective treatments retain larger-diameter trees.** A long-term Sierra Nevada study published in Fire Ecology found that effective shaded fuel breaks "reduced

live basal area and retained larger-diameter trees," with benefits persisting through a 20-year study period (Low, Battles, Tompkins, Dillingham, Stephens, & Collins, 2023, Fire Ecology).

• **Midstory removal — not overstory removal — drives effectiveness.** Peer-reviewed research published in Fire Ecology provides "strong empirical evidence that mechanical thinning of midstory and co-dominant trees mitigates fire behavior and resulting fire severity." The same study cautions that removing the forest midstory entirely, or opening the overstory excessively, can enhance fuel drying and increase mid-flame windspeeds, potentially increasing fire severity under wind-driven conditions (Fire Ecology, 2024).

• **Historical logging of large trees increased fire severity.** The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project Report (SNEP, 1996) concluded that "timber harvest, through its effects on forest structure, local microclimate, and fuels accumulation, has increased fire severity more than any other recent human activity." Large-diameter tree populations across Sierra Nevada mixed-conifer forests were dramatically reduced by 19th- and 20th-century logging (Lutz et al., 2012, PLOS ONE).

• **"Thinning is not logging."** U.S. Forest Service research ecologist Gavin Jones, lead author on misinformation in fire science (Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 2022), draws a clear distinction: logging harvests large mature trees and generates revenue, while thinning primarily removes small trees and typically costs money. Conflating the two — sometimes described as "silviculture by stealth" — obscures whether a given project is genuinely restoring forest resilience or recouping costs through merchantable timber.

Specific Concern Regarding Van Sickle

Given Van Sickle Bi-State Park's proximity to the South Shore tourist core, its co-management with Nevada Division of State Parks, and the project's stated emphasis on safety and equitable access, any tree removal associated with the project — whether for trail and plaza construction or for fuels reduction — warrants careful, transparent documentation.

I am particularly concerned because tree removal driven by merchantability rather than ecological function can result in "high-grading": removing the largest, most fire-resistant, and most ecologically valuable trees while leaving smaller understory trees that may function as ladder fuels and promote dense regrowth. This practice is the opposite of what the science recommends for building genuine wildfire resilience.

Requests for the Final Supplemental IS/MND/IEC and Project Implementation

To ensure that tree removal at Van Sickle aligns with current best science and with the project's stated forest health and resilience objectives, I respectfully request that the Conservancy provide, prior to project adoption:

- **A diameter-at-breast-height (DBH) retention standard** for all tree removal associated with the project, including a clearly stated upper-diameter limit above which trees will be retained except where demonstrably hazardous.
- A clear distinction, in the Final Supplemental IS/MND/IEC, between trees removed for *infrastructure* (trail, plaza, parking, restroom, and circulation improvements) and trees removed for *forest resilience or fuels reduction*, with separate counts and rationale for each category.
- **Documentation of the silvicultural prescription,** including target stand structure, basal area retention, and species composition goals — and a citation to the scientific basis for the prescription.
- **A commitment to retain fire-resistant species and individuals,** particularly mature Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, and incense cedar, consistent with retention guidance in the peer-reviewed literature cited above.
- **Third-party or independent verification** of which trees are marked for removal, with the marking criteria made publicly available before cutting begins.
- **A map of the project area showing proposed tree removal zones** overlaid with infrastructure footprints, stream environment zones, and any merchantable timber areas.
- **A post-treatment monitoring commitment** with publicly reported results, including stand structure metrics and any subsequent need for retreatment of regrowth.

Conclusion

I support the Conservancy's broader goals of safe, equitable, and non-motorized access at Van Sickle Bi-State Park, and I appreciate the work that has gone into the draft environmental document. My concern is narrowly focused on ensuring that tree removal practices reflect the current weight of scientific evidence and that the project does not inadvertently reduce the long-term fire resilience and ecological value of the forest it is intended to protect.

I would welcome the opportunity to review the project map and any supplemental

documentation on the silvicultural prescription. I also respectfully request to be added to the project notification list for any board meetings, hearings, or further opportunities for public input.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Sincerely,

Hannah Lingley

480-433-4323

References

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Hannah Lingley