

Opinion: Collaboration keeps plant from being endangered

By Joanne Marchetta

Lake Tahoe has been recognized for another important conservation success. Our region's proactive, collaborative strategy to protect Tahoe yellow cress, begun almost 15 years ago, is working so well that the plant does not need additional protections under the federal Endangered Species Act.

This conservation success story is yet another example of epic collaboration – how unparalleled partnership and collaboration are getting things done at Lake Tahoe. In this case, protecting a unique wildflower species that once teetered on the brink of extinction has avoided the need for additional federal protections that would have regulated many private homeowners as well as many public recreation areas.



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Tahoe yellow cress is a flowering perennial plant that grows only along Tahoe's beautiful, and popular, sandy beaches. Patches of the wildflower must spread and shift with the ever-changing water levels of our lake. The flower is found nowhere else in the world.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this month announced its

decision not to list Tahoe yellow cress as a federally endangered or threatened species after an extensive review found previously identified habitat threats no longer pose significant risk to the health and well-being of the species.

Over the last 10-plus years, those habitat threats to Tahoe yellow cress have been managed and successfully reduced by the broad group of federal, state, local, and private sector partners on the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group. This group has protected the plant and its habitat with a comprehensive conservation strategy that was first put into action in 2002 to keep this unique and rare Lake Tahoe wildflower from disappearing forever.

That conservation strategy has been successfully implemented. So much so that in announcing its decision, the Fish and Wildlife Service, said, "The efforts of the Lake Tahoe area working group and its technical team and the partnership they've built over the past decade to protect this unique plant have truly exemplified the most basic function of the Endangered Species Act – to protect and conserve ecosystems and the species that depend upon them. They have continued to raise the standards for the next generation of conservation and convinced us that Tahoe yellow cress has a bright future on the beautiful shores of Lake Tahoe."

That success has not come easily, and it has involved the dedicated and coordinated work of many partners at Lake Tahoe, including regulatory and land management agencies, private property owners, and the public.

Members of the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group include California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Lands Commission, California State Parks, California Tahoe Conservancy, League to Save Lake Tahoe, Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Division of State Lands, Nevada Division of State Parks, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Tahoe Lakefront Owners' Association, U.S. Forest

Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Protecting Tahoe yellow cress and its habitat is one of the goals of the environmental improvement program, the collaborative capital improvement program that TRPA manages to restore Lake Tahoe's environment and improve recreational opportunities. More than 50 public and private partners work together to prioritize and implement projects through the EIP, including projects to protect Tahoe yellow cress.

This broad group of stakeholders saw the problems facing Tahoe yellow cress and formed a collaborative working group to take on the challenge of protecting this imperiled wildflower species in its one-of-a-kind home here at Lake Tahoe. By partnering and working together we have protected Tahoe yellow cress and its habitat, collected and germinated seeds to plant new populations of the wildflower to increase its range, and educated people about this plant and the importance of protecting it while enjoying Tahoe's beaches and natural areas.

This decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that our partnership and collaboration are working and that our conservation strategy is sound. Members of the Tahoe Yellow Cress Adaptive Management Working Group recently updated that conservation strategy and have agreed to continue to implement it.

We agree with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that Tahoe yellow cress has a bright future at Lake Tahoe. But this conservation success story also shows there is a bright future for partnership and collaboration at Tahoe. And partnership and collaboration have proven time and time again to be what is most needed to find common solutions and solve many more of our environmental challenges at Tahoe.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional

Planning Agency.