

Johnson Meadows in SLT to be preserved



The Johnson Meadows parcel in South Lake Tahoe will soon be owned by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.

By Kathryn Reed

Most of the lower nine miles of the Upper Truckee River are about to come under public ownership.

On Thursday the California Tahoe Conservancy awarded a \$4.234 million grant to Tahoe Resource Conservation District to help buy the nearly 209-acre plot known as Johnson Meadows. This

equates to half of the selling price. The property is south of Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe and near the Upper Truckee Marsh.

“Originally, the UTR meandered through the middle of the property’s meadow and overtopped its banks regularly, depositing fine material onto the floodplain almost every year. Some time prior to 1940, the UTR was moved to the east side of the meadow and flows to the meadow were controlled for irrigation purposes,” the staff report from the March 17 meeting reads.

The acquisition means more than 1,000 acres of the river’s floodplain is publicly owned. The Conservancy owns the marsh that borders the Johnson Meadows and Lake Tahoe, as well as the Sunset reach on the other side of the meadow.

The money for the purchase comes from Proposition 1 funds, the 2014 voter approved water bond.

The board awarded seven grants totaling \$7,161,568.

Thirty applications valued at more than \$30 million were submitted. Conservancy staff and an outside panel whittled the list down to the one that was approved.

The other approved projects include:

- Lake Tahoe Invasive Plant Control Project, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, \$700,000: To remove aquatic invasive plants from several marinas on the South Shore.
- Meeks Meadow Restoration, Washoe Tribe, \$228,530: To support planning related to restoring the ecological, hydrologic, and cultural functions of Meeks Meadow.
- Lake Tahoe West Collaborative: A Multi-Jurisdictional Landscape Restoration Strategy, National Forest Foundation, \$849,100: To develop an interagency

plan to restore and protect forest health and key watersheds from Emerald Bay to Tahoe City.

- Tahoe Basin Wildlife Protection and Water Quality Enhancement Project, Lake Valley and North Tahoe fire protection districts, \$850,000: To develop a plan to streamline permitting of forest health projects surrounding Tahoe's urban and residential communities.

- Antone Meadows Dam Removal and Restoration, Burton Creek State Park, California Department of State Parks, \$149,938: For planning activities to restore sections of Burton Creek and remove the Antone Meadows dam and related infrastructure.

- Tahoe Storm Water Resource Plan, Tahoe Resource Conservation District, \$150,000: To develop a comprehensive water quality plan to reduce and treat runoff that degrades the lake's clarity.

Another \$6.3 million has been set aside to possibly fund three projects that have yet to complete the CEQA environmental review. This includes \$4 million for what is called the Bijou Park Creek Watershed and SEZ restoration project. South Lake Tahoe had asked for \$4.67 million.

This is the proposal to **raze the Knights Inn on Highway 50**, combine the parcel with the one at the corner of Highway 50 and Ski Run Boulevard, then restore the creek flowing underground, reduce fine sediment by 8,000 pounds a year and then build something new there.

South Lake Tahoe City Councilman Tom Davis, who is the city's rep on the CTC board, said, "If we don't get that additional \$670,000, we can't do that project. This is a once in a lifetime shot for us."

Three members of the city's staff spoke during public comment, giving more specifics about the project. They, however, did

not say the project would not go forward without full funding.

Resident Ed Moser spoke against that project, saying the CTC could better spend the money elsewhere.

The other two projects in limbo include a potential \$1.3 million for Griff Creek corridor in Placer County and \$1 million for stream environmental restoration in Meyers.

Assuming those three projects are awarded at the June or September meetings at the levels staff recommends, the CTC still has \$488,432 to spend.