

Spotlight on the California Tahoe Conservancy

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There are many organizations that are working to help protect and restore Tahoe's natural environment. Some of these organizations are in the news (sometimes in the "hot seat") and some operate more behind the scenes. Last month we looked at Forest Service projects, and now we'll take a look at the California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC), another organization that is instrumental in protecting environmentally sensitive lands in the Tahoe area.

The CTC is an independent state agency within the California Resources Agency. It is not a regulatory agency, but rather was established to develop and implement programs through the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands that could otherwise be urbanized. These lands are then restored to improve water quality in Lake Tahoe, preserve the scenic beauty and recreational opportunities of the region, provide public access, preserve wildlife habitat areas, and protect the natural environment.

Since 1985, the Conservancy has authorized the expenditure of over \$240 million for its programs. Specifically, CTC has acquired over 5,700 parcels of land (or more than 7,000 acres) and has implemented more than 525 significant site improvements and management projects. By acquiring environmentally sensitive land, such as lands with very steep slopes that contribute to soil erosion or wetland areas that can filter water heading toward Lake Tahoe, CTC is able to help offset or mitigate the effects of development. CTC programs sup-

port the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), one of the most comprehensive water quality preservation and restoration programs in the country. CTC improvement projects include planning and/or construction of more than 165 miles of roadway drainage facilities, revegetation of more than 145 acres, and restoration of more than 380 acres of damaged wetlands and meadows. Examples of these projects include the Cold Creek Restoration Project and the Trout Creek Wildlife Enhancement and Stream Restoration Project (in partnership with the City of South Lake Tahoe), and the Upper Truckee River Wetland Restoration Project.

In addition to land acquisition and site improvement projects, CTC also works to increase public access and recreation opportunities for visitors to the lake. The basin experiences up to 23 million visitor days of use (about six times the use of Yosemite) with up to 200,000 people visiting on a busy summer weekend. Visitors and residents are drawn to the shores of Lake Tahoe, but only about a third of the Lake's shoreline is in public ownership. Since 1985, CTC has improved access to over 480 acres of land and enhanced access to the lake on over 3 miles of lake and beach frontage, contributing to the creation of 48 miles of hiking, biking and cross-country skiing trails. Public access projects have included the Kings Beach Recreation Enhancement Project and a partnership with the Tahoe City Public Utility District on the Lakeside Bike Trail Project.

Another focus of the CTC is wildlife enhance-

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The Lake Tahoe Report

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ment and wetland restoration. Lake Tahoe provides wildlife habitat areas for over 300 species of fish and wildlife, including the Bald Eagle, Peregrine falcon and Lahontan cutthroat trout. In fact, the basin provides habitat for more than 25 endangered, threatened or special interest species. However, the process of urbanization has drastically reduced wildlife habitat and populations in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Specifically, development has reduced marshlands by 75 percent, meadowlands by 50 percent, and riparian habitat by 35 percent. More than 80 miles of the basin's streams and rivers have been degraded. CTC authorized wildlife enhancement projects include protection of stream habitat in Cold, Taylor, Ward, Angora, General, and Blackwood Creeks. In the Upper Truckee River, CTC has installed Bald Eagle perches and osprey nesting platforms, and has worked to preserve forest, meadow, and stream habitat that provide needed corridors for traveling wildlife.

Recognizing that the long-term success of the program depends on public understanding and support, the Conservancy is working to foster better awareness of Tahoe's wildlife resources by providing informational signing, shelter displays, self-guided nature trails and wildlife viewing platforms as integral parts of their programs.

Here are some things you can do to help the CTC, and other agencies, to protect, preserve, enhance, and restore the natural resources in the Tahoe Basin. When visiting highly sensitive areas such as wetlands, take care not to disturb the plants and

wildlife, or cause erosion, by staying on existing trails on the edges of these sites. Wetlands are some of the most sensitive ecosystems on the planet, and up to 85 percent of all wildlife species utilize wetlands during part or all of their lives. Because these sites are so sensitive, keep your dogs (where allowed) on a leash at all times and pick-up after your pet. Dogs running in a wetland meadow can cause serious problems for the wildlife by killing, injuring, or causing stress. Take dogs to less sensitive areas, such as upland forests, to let them romp and play. Finally, participate in the public process by providing your input early during the planning, design, and environmental review phase of projects. Inform yourselves about nearby CTC projects by attending public meetings and let your voice be heard.

If you would like more information about CTC programs or projects, visit <http://www.tahoecons.ca.gov/>.