CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
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CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR RESTORATION PROJECTS
CONCURRENCE NO. 21080.56-2025-088-R2

Project:	Johnson Meadow Upper Truckee River Middle Reaches 1 & 2 Restoration Project
Location:	El Dorado County
Lead Agency:	Tahoe Resource Conservation District
Lead Agency Contact:	Andrew Schurr; aschurr@tahoercd.org

Background

Project Location: The Johnson Meadow Upper Truckee River Middle Reaches 1 & 2 Restoration Project (Project) is located on Johnson Meadow, which lies along the Upper Truckee River (UTR), approximately 1.5 miles upstream of Lake Tahoe. The 230-acre meadow is owned by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District (TRCD), and is situated near the City of South Lake Tahoe, adjacent to Highway 50 and the South Lake Tahoe Airport. The approximate coordinates of the Project are 38.916894, -119.989550.

Project Description: The Tahoe RCD proposes to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife on the UTR within Johnson Meadow. The Project will help increase the clarity of Lake Tahoe, improve aquatic and terrestrial habitat, increase climate resilience, and provide numerous ecosystem benefits. The Project is designed to restore approximately 206 acres of floodplain; enhance aquatic and riparian habitat along nearly 3 miles of river channels; and improve habitat conditions for special status aquatic, plant, and wildlife species.

The Project will include work in four channels of the UTR in Johnson Meadow, which for this Project have been named as follows: the Gully Channel; the Naturalized Channel; the Historical Channel; and the West Channel. Details on channel conditions and proposed work are provided below.

- The Gully Channel is a captured irrigation ditch within the meadow and is deeply incised. The Project will fill the channel and redirect water back to the other three channels.
- The Naturalized Channel is incised and eroding. A grade control structure will be installed to promote aggradation, and bank treatments in this channel will increase riparian shading and stabilize banks. Portions of this channel will be filled and replaced to increase channel length.

- The Historical Channel and West Channel are currently disconnected from the UTR and do not convey water. Four tie-in channels will be created to introduce flow into these channels. Accumulated sediment will be removed from these Channels, and biotechnical treatments will be installed.

In addition, a rock grade-control structure will be installed upstream of the US Highway 50 bridge to provide for fish passage. The grade-control structure will lead to natural aggradation that will raise the upstream bed of the Naturalized Channel. This increased bed elevation will increase floodplain inundation to restore natural hydrologic processes that will enhance meadow and riparian habitat.

There is also sewer and other utility infrastructure in the meadow that will be relocated or protected in order to prevent a sewer leak that would impact water quality, and to accommodate channel grading to achieve restoration objectives. The sewer line protection will reduce the risk of aquatic organism mortality and habitat degradation from algal blooms, or water quality deterioration that could occur with a sewer line leak.

Following the initial restoration phase, ongoing management will be guided by a monitoring and/or an adaptive management plan that is expected to measure function, and includes monitoring for channel migration, transported sediment splays, aggradation of the meadow, and changes in vegetation communities. Any work during this period will be to address continued Project function.

Tribal Engagement: Tahoe RCD contacted the Native American Heritage Commission to conduct a search of the Sacred Lands File for the Project area in October 2019 and in May 2025. A Project information letter and map was sent and then followed up with phone calls to a representative of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe Tribe) in late 2019. In May 2025, Project information letters were sent to the Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe, the Susanville Indian Rancheria, the United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria, the Washoe Tribe, and the Wilton Rancheria. A representative of the Washoe Tribe is a member of the Project's Technical Working Group (TWG) and has provided input and will continue to participate in the TWG through the final design, restoration, and adaptive management phases of the Project.

Interested Party Coordination: During a seven-year planning process, Tahoe RCD has engaged with the public, interested parties, and the TWG. TWG is composed of local and regional agency experts and partners that include: the California Tahoe Conservancy, City of South Lake Tahoe, South Lake Tahoe Airport, United States Forest Service, South Tahoe Public Utility District, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (LRWQCB), Bureau of Reclamation, League to Save Lake Tahoe, California State Parks, and El Dorado County. Two virtual public workshops were held in 2020 and 2021 to introduce the Project and conceptual alternatives and solicit public feedback on the design and management of the site. Since then, Tahoe RCD has produced social and physical media outreach, held several public stewardship events, and conducted onsite outreach. The most recent onsite walks with the public and interested parties took place on October 18 and 20, 2025. Ongoing public outreach will include mailers, webinars, stewardship events, and on-site meetings, as well as

additional TWG involvement during the final design phase of the Project.

Anticipated Project Implementation Timeframes: Start date: March 2026
Completion date: November 2033

Lead Agency Request for CDFW Concurrence: On December 29, 2025, the Director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW Director) received a concurrence request from the Lead Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (e) (Request). The Request seeks the CDFW Director's concurrence with the Lead Agency's determination on December 26, 2025 that the Project meets certain qualifying criteria set forth in subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive, of the same section of the Public Resources Code (Lead Agency Determination). The CDFW Director's concurrence is required for the Lead Agency to approve the Project relying on this section of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.).

Concurrence Determination

The CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency Determination that the Project meets the qualifying criteria set forth in Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive (Concurrence).

Specifically, the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project meets all of the following conditions: (A) the Project is exclusively to conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or is exclusively to restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife; (B) the Project may have public benefits incidental to the Project's fundamental purpose; (C) the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment; and (D) Project construction activities are solely related to habitat restoration. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (g), CDFW will post this Concurrence on its CEQA Notices and Documents internet page: https://wildlife.ca.gov/Notices/CEQA.

This Concurrence is based on best available science and supported, as described below, by substantial evidence in CDFW's administrative record of proceedings for the Project.

This Concurrence is also based on a finding that the Project is consistent with and that its implementation will further CDFW's mandate as California's trustee agency for fish and wildlife, including the responsibility to hold and manage these resources in trust for all the people of California.

Discussion

A. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (a), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will exclusively conserve, restore, protect, or enhance, and assist in the recovery of California native fish and

wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend; or restore or provide habitat for California native fish and wildlife.

The Project will reactivate approximately 2.9 miles of the Historical and West Channels, and the Naturalized Channel will be enhanced to increase aquatic habitat complexity and improve riparian shading, including the creation of a new, approximately 2,800-foot channel segment that will extend the channel length by up to 600 feet. The Project will increase the spatial extent of meadow inundation at river flows of 370 cubic feet per second from 15.4 acres to approximately 79.8 acres. This will result in wetter meadow conditions and an increase in the extent and vigor of riparian and wet meadow habitat. Complete filling of the Gully Channel is expected to raise the local groundwater table, and may result in more flow within the Naturalized Channel during baseflow periods and colder dry-season water temperatures to improve habitat for native aquatic species.

As a result, the Project will improve aquatic habitat complexity, substrate diversity, and riparian shading, which will benefit native fish of all life stages, and will improve terrestrial wildlife habitat area, complexity, and function, with focus on sensitive and common wildlife species associated with riparian and wet meadow habitat. There are 30 special-status wildlife species that could occur in or near the Project area, with 22 of these expected to directly benefit from improved habitat conditions in the Project area.

The Project will conserve, restore, protect, enhance, and assist in the recovery of willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*; listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act [CESA]) and Lahontan cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus henshawi;* listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act [ESA] and a California Species of Special Concern [SSC]). The Project will also improve aquatic habitat through increased channel bed complexity and riparian shading, benefiting habitat for multiple species including Lahontan cutthroat trout, western pearlshell (*Margaritifera falcata*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*; listed as SSC), and Lahontan mountain sucker (*Catostomus platyrhynchus; listed as SSC*).

B. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (b), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project may have incidental public benefits, such as public access and recreation.

   The Project does not include creating any new public access or recreation benefits, however, existing public access and recreational opportunities within the site will continue upon completing the restoration phase of the Project. As a result, the Project may benefit the recreation community by incidentally improving aesthetic value and wildlife-viewing opportunities.

C. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (c), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project will result in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery, and includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment.

Long-term Net Benefits to Climate Resiliency: The Project area is expected to experience changes in hydrology due to climate change. These changes include periods of extended droughts and an increase in the proportion of precipitation falling as rain instead of snow, which can result in increased flooding. The Project will result in a net benefit to climate resiliency by increasing the capacity to attenuate flood flows through increased connectivity with the floodplain. This would minimize downstream effects of climate-induced floods and protect downstream habitat and water quality. Floodplain restoration will also increase infiltration of overbank flows and groundwater storage. This increase in groundwater availability will also increase wetland vegetative growth and therefore carbon sequestration. The wetter meadow will also increase resilience to wildfire.

Long-term Net Benefits to Biodiversity: The Project will restore hydrologic processes within the meadow by filling the Gully Channel and reactivating historic channels, which will enhance riparian and wet meadow habitat. Restored hydrologic processes will increase the spatial extent of floodplain inundation from approximately 45 acres to approximately 140 acres under the 2-year recurrence flow and increase the duration of floodplain inundation from an annual average of 7 days to 74 days. The Project will directly benefit aquatic habitat within the Naturalized Channel by improving riparian shading and establishing geomorphic conditions that will lead to increased pool and riffle development. The Project will also directly benefit riparian and meadow habitat through revegetation of native species and targeted bank treatments.

Furthermore, the Project will support increased vegetation growth and diversity through increased wetness of the meadow and in-stream habitat improvements. Natural communities of wet montane meadow plant species are expected to benefit from the Project. These plant species include aspen (*Populus tremuoides)*, alder (*Alnus incana ssp. tenuifolia*), Lemmon's willow (*Salix lemmonii)*, Sierra willow (*Salix orestera*), and shining willow (*Salix lasiandra*).

Long-term Net Benefits to Sensitive Species Recovery: Based on surveys completed for the Project, Lahontan mountain sucker is a specific sensitive species that have been documented within the Project area. There are 22 additional special status wildlife species with the potential to occur and may benefit in the long-term from restored river and meadow conditions through increased habitat complexity and heterogeneity. Consequently, the Project is expected to result in long-term suitable habitat to benefit Lahontan cutthroat trout, western pearlshell, and mountain whitefish. The long-term benefits to these species will include increased vigor and extent of riparian habitat; enhanced riparian shading and a reduced width to depth ratio of the channel; decreased summer water temperatures; improved water quality from increased floodplain sediment deposition and reduced erosion; and improved channel bedform and substrate conditions through increased formation and availability of pools and riffles.

Procedures for the Protection of the Environment: The Project includes design criteria that have been specifically developed to minimize environmental effects during the restoration phase of the Project. The Project is subject to all environmental and

species protection measures listed in the State Water Resources Control Board Statewide Restoration General Order. A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan will be developed and implemented for the Project.

Additional best management practices to protect water quality will be used for the Project, which include erosion and sediment controls, timing work to minimize disturbance (during low flows), worker education, and turbidity monitoring. For all work in the river channel, a dewatering plan will be implemented. The Project will adhere to all permit conditions from the LRWQCB, TRPA, US Army Corps of Engineers, City of South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County, CDFW, and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Environmental commitments of the Project also include reducing emissions, preparing and implementing an invasive species management plan, and preparing and implementing effective site management plans to minimize risks of water quality degradation and impacts to vegetation.

Ongoing Management for the Protection of the Environment: The Project is designed to result in a self-sustaining natural system that would require minimal human intervention. Adaptive management to address unexpected damage will be performed by the Tahoe RCD as the property owner, per an adaptive management plan which is in preparation. In addition, Tahoe RCD will be supported by the interagency UTR Watershed Advisory Group, which is a collaborative group of public agencies and interested parties that guides the restoration and adaptive management of the UTR watershed.

The Project area will be monitored and adaptively managed. Monitoring will include an assessment of changes in the number of distributary channels, transported sediment splays, aggradation of the meadow, die-off of plant species, and unexpected bank erosion. Wood and sediment deposition at the inlet of the tie-in channels that may block the flow distribution to the Historical and West Channels will be removed or reworked to maintain a connection to the floodplain at the desired flow frequency. The filled Gully Channel will be monitored to prevent recapture through increased floodplain roughness and added buried grade controls. Beaver activity will be monitored to address any system modifications made by beavers. Instream structures will be monitored to ensure continued functionality. The grade control structure will be monitored to ensure it remains passable by fish and is not subject to headcutting, undercutting, flanking, or other issues that could lead to failure or non-functionality.

D. Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56, subdivision (d), the CDFW Director concurs with the Lead Agency that the Project does not include any construction activities, except those solely related to habitat restoration.

The use of heavy machinery is anticipated to include: excavating soil from a borrow location and filling the Gully Channel, creating 2,800 linear feet of new river channel, installing bioengineered bank treatments in the Naturalized Channel, implementing targeted sediment excavation and bank treatments in the Historical and West Channels, creation of tie-in channels to direct flows into the Historical and West

Channels, and implementing sewer line and other utility protection features to protect water quality.

Scope and Reservation of Concurrence

This Concurrence is based on the proposed Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request. If there are any subsequent changes to the Project that affect or otherwise change the Lead Agency Determination, the Lead Agency, or any other public agency that proposes to carry out or approve the Project, shall submit a new lead agency determination and request for concurrence from CDFW pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.56. If any other public agency proposes to carry out or approve the Project subsequent to the effective date of this Concurrence, this Concurrence shall remain in effect and no separate concurrence from CDFW shall be required so long as the other public agency is carrying out or approving the Project as described by the Lead Agency Determination and the Request.

Other Legal Obligations

The Project shall remain subject to all other applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and this Concurrence shall not weaken or violate any applicable environmental or public health standards. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56, subd. (f).)

CDFW Director's Certification

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By: Valerie Termini _____ Date: 2/3/2026

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Valerie Termini, Acting Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife