TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

TRPA
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STAFF REPORT

Date: August 19, 2026

To: Environmental Improvement Program Committee of the TRPA Governing Board

From: TRPA Staff

Subject: Discussion Regarding Herbicide Use Associated with the Caldor Fire Restoration Project

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Summary and Staff Recommendation:
During the May 2026 TRPA Governing Board Strategic Retreat, Board members requested additional information regarding potential herbicide use associated with the U.S. Forest Service's Caldor Fire Restoration Project. The U.S. Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, is leading the project to advance post-fire restoration and watershed and ecological recovery within the Caldor Fire burn scar. Treatment design remains in progress, and the Forest Service has confirmed that no herbicide applications will occur during the 2026 or 2027 field seasons.

Staff will provide a high-level introduction and context on the existing regulatory and interagency framework, including TRPA's role in achieving and maintaining Lake Tahoe's environmental thresholds. Forest Service staff will provide an overview of the project, anticipated implementation approach, and resource protection measures. Staff will then facilitate a discussion regarding the next steps on the Caldor Fire Restoration Project.

Requested Committee Direction:
Committee to provide direction to TRPA staff on next steps related to the Caldor Fire Restoration Project.

For any motion to pass, a majority of the quorum present is required.

Background:
In 2021, the Caldor Fire burned 221,835 acres, including 9,885 acres within the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Forest Service, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, published the Caldor Fire Restoration Project scoping document for public review in April 2025, released a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review in December 2025, and completed the final EA in March 2026 (Online Resource A).

The Project is intended to restore desired ecological processes and habitat conditions and improve resiliency to drought, insect and disease outbreaks, and future wildfire impacts. To achieve those goals, the Project proposes restoration actions on approximately 7,980 acres. The EA identifies approximately 4,900 acres where natural forest regeneration is unlikely (<40% probability of regeneration) and proposed strategic reforestation on approximately 2,400-3,600 acres.

The EA identifies herbicide use as a potential tool for two purposes: site preparation before tree planting, and management of competing vegetation after planting. Any herbicide application would be required to comply with applicable federal and state pesticide requirements, including U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved product labels, California Department of Pesticide Regulation requirements, and applicable Forest Service resource protection measures and best management practices.

The Project also includes additional resource protection measures and best management practices related to potential herbicide use. These include but are not limited to, no application between June 1 and September 30; application only through low-volume, targeted methods; no application in high-value foraging areas for the Monarch butterfly; and no herbicide application in Whitebark pine stands.

The proposal includes reforestation of 2,400–3,600 acres. Within those areas, herbicide use would be limited to locations where tree planting occurs, and not all planted acres are expected to require herbicide treatment.

TRPA Role and Existing Regulatory Framework:
The Caldor Fire Restoration Project is a Forest Service project on National Forest System lands. The Forest Service is the federal land manager and lead agency responsible for project planning, environmental review, and implementation decisions.

Pesticides, including herbicides, are regulated at the federal level by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). In California, pesticide products must also comply with requirements administered by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) before they may be sold or used in the state. DPR conducts ongoing evaluation of registered pesticides and may impose additional mitigation measures, restrictions, or other regulatory requirements where warranted.

TRPA Code section 60.1.7 addresses pesticide use, including insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. The Code does not categorically prohibit herbicide use, but it discourages pesticide use for pest management, calls for consideration of integrated pest management practices and alternatives to chemical application, and includes protections for Stream Environment Zones, surface water, and groundwater.

TRPA and the Forest Service also operate under an adopted Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that governs review of Forest Service activities on National Forest System lands in the Lake Tahoe Basin. The MOU identifies certain Forest Service activities that are exempt from TRPA review, including specified vegetation management, reforestation, revegetation, forest protection, erosion control, and watershed restoration activities. Activities not exempt under the MOU are reviewed by TRPA under the applicable provisions of the Regional Plan and Code.

Although the MOU provides the framework for determining when Forest Service activities require TRPA review, exemption from TRPA project review does not eliminate TRPA's interest in interagency coordination, environmental safeguards, public transparency, and protection of Lake Tahoe's environmental thresholds. On May 27, 2026, TRPA sent a letter to the Forest Service requesting additional engagement on the Caldor Restoration Project.

Contact Information:
For questions regarding this agenda item, please contact Kat McIntyre, PhD, Environmental Improvement Program Director, 775-589-5268, or kmcintyre@trpa.gov.

Contributing Public Comment:

- Please submit written comments by 3 p.m. the day before the meeting.
- You may email comments to publiccomment@trpa.gov. Include meeting details and agenda item in the subject line or write "General Comment" for non-agenda items.
- You may also send by mail, fax to (775) 588-4527, or drop off in person at 128 Market Street.

Attachments/Online Resources:

A. USFS Caldor Fire Restoration Project Materials
B. Memorandum Of Understanding Tahoe Regional Planning Agency U.S. Department Of Agriculture, Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
C. TRPA Letter to USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, May 2026

Attachment A

USFS Caldor Fire Restoration Project Materials

Attachment B

Memorandum Of Understanding Tahoe Regional Planning Agency U.S. Department Of Agriculture, Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit

Attachment C

TRPA Letter to USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, May 2026