

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Zoom
TRPA

January 24, 2024

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Chair Ms. Faustinos called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m. on January 24, 2024.

Members present: Ms. Faustinos, Ms. Laine, Mr. Settelmeyer, and Ms. Hays. Ms. Conrad-Saydah joined at 9:43 a.m.

Members absent: Mr. Rice and Ms. Williamson.

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Caringer stated no changes to the agenda.

Chair Faustinos deemed the agenda approved as posted.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Williamson moved approval of the April 26, 2024 Environmental Improvement, Transportation, and Public Outreach Committee minutes and of the February 22, 2023 Forest Health and Wildfire Committee minutes as presented.

Motion carried by voice vote.

III. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Member Laine nominated Presidential Appointee Meghan Hays to be Vice Chair of the Environmental Improvement Program Committee.

Committee Member Comments

None.

Public Comment

None.

Member Laine made a motion to elect Meghan Hays to serve as Vice Chair of the EIP Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT, TRANSPORTATION, & PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

Ayes: Ms. Faustinos, Ms. Laine, Mr. Settelmeyer, Ms. Hays and Ms. Conrad-Saydah.

Nays: None.

Motion carried.

Presentation: None

IV. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE DIRECTION TO STAFF ON THE EIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND COMMITTEE GOAL SETTING

Kim Caringer, Deputy Director and Chief Partnerships Officer, presented for TRPA staff. Ms. Caringer expressed excitement about the inaugural meeting of the new Environmental Improvement Committee, emphasizing the need to focus solely on environmental improvement. She outlined her goals for the committee, which include gathering feedback from members on areas of interest and potential impact.

She provided an overview of the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), detailing its history dating back to the Lake Tahoe Federal Summit in 1997. Caringer highlighted the collaborative efforts led by Senators Dianne Feinstein and Harry Reid, emphasizing the shift from a purely regulatory approach to proactive environmental projects.

The EIP, described as the implementation arm of the regional plan, has overseen over 800 projects in the past 27 years across various sectors such as water quality, forest health, recreation, and transportation. Ms. Caringer likened the EIP to a capital improvement program but emphasized its unique focus on environmental restoration to achieve regional plan goals and thresholds.

Member Laine asked if the accounting included private sector projects and Ms. Caringer confirmed that it did. Ms. Caringer emphasized the collaborative nature of the program, involving various partners from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the private sector, nonprofit organizations, residents, and visitors. The EIP serves as the implementation arm of the regional plan, focusing on environmental restoration and resilience.

Ms. Caringer described the EIP as a model of collective impact, with shared goals, priorities, and performance measures across jurisdictions. TRPA plays a central role in coordinating these efforts, serving as a convener, leader, and administrator of the program.

The presentation delved into the specific focus areas of the EIP, including watersheds and water quality, forest health, sustainable recreation, transportation, and science stewardship. Ms. Caringer provided examples of projects and initiatives within each focus area, highlighting achievements and ongoing efforts.

Funding for the EIP primarily comes from the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, which has been reauthorized and leveraged to support projects. However, Ms. Caringer emphasized the importance of matching funds from various sectors to fully implement the program's goals. Member Laine asked if the pie chart on the slide was symbolically showing the 5 different sectors or if it was proportionally accurate. Ms. Caringer confirmed it was a symbolic chart. In her closing remarks, Kim Caringer directed attention to the comprehensive data tracking within the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). She mentioned an upcoming slide that would provide detailed information on funding contributions over the past 27 years, illustrating the

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT, TRANSPORTATION, & PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

shares from federal, California, Nevada, and local sources. Ms. Caringer emphasized the transparency and accountability of the EIP through platforms like the EIP tracker and Lake Tahoe info.org. These resources allow stakeholders to monitor funding allocations and observe the tangible outcomes of investment on the ground. She welcomed feedback from the committee on whether they desired further insight into how funding translates into action within each program area.

Member Hayes asked a question that pertains to the breakdown of funding labeled as "local" within the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). She asked whether this category comprises contributions solely from local municipalities or if it includes other sources of funding from within the local area, such as donations or support from non-municipal entities. Hayes is seeking clarity on the origin and nature of the funds categorized as "local" within the EIP's funding structure. Ms. Caringer responded that it is the local municipalities in the basin; the 5 counties and the City of South Lake Tahoe.

Chair Faustinos' question revolves around the reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act (LTRA) and whether it includes provisions aimed at increasing the amount available for appropriation. Faustinos inquires if there are efforts underway to augment the funding allocated through the LTRA, considering that only a quarter of the authorized amount has been appropriated thus far. Essentially, he seeks clarification on whether there are plans to pursue an increase in funding through the reauthorization process. Executive Director Regan responded that there are no plans to alter the amount allocated in the reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act (LTRA). Despite approximately 300 million dollars remaining unappropriated from the existing authorization, the proposal seeks solely to extend the duration of the bill by an additional ten years without any changes to the funding provisions or other aspects of the legislation. Ms. Regan emphasizes that the primary focus is on extending the bill's timeframe rather than modifying its content.

Kim's presentation at the end emphasizes the importance of the annual Lake Tahoe Summit in bringing together stakeholders to discuss commitments, progress, threats, and priorities. She mentions that Senator Cortez Masto will host this year's summit, underscoring the tradition of collective commitment across various sectors, including federal, state, local, tribal, private, and scientific communities.

She outlines future focus areas for the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP), including achieving lake clarity goals, increasing efforts to address aquatic invasive species (AIS), enhancing watershed restoration, improving transportation, promoting sustainable recreation, advancing science, and engaging in community outreach and communication.

Additionally, Ms. Caringer suggests potential areas of focus for the committee, such as leading and coordinating EIP efforts, community engagement and communication, streamlining permitting processes for restoration projects, participating in threshold evaluations, and advocating for relevant legislation and policies, including the reauthorization of the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act.

Committee Member Comments

Chair Faustinos commended Ms. Caringer for the impressive body of work presented and encourages everyone to review the report of accomplishments. She expresses gratitude to the staff for their hard work. Chair Faustinos opened the floor to

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT, TRANSPORTATION, & PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

committee members for input on the focus areas outlined by Ms. Caringer and invited suggestions for additional areas to include in the committee's work plan for the year. She indicated that input from both in-person and online participants is welcomed.

Director Settlemeier expressed appreciation for the ambitious goals outlined in the presentation. He acknowledged the importance of finding the necessary resources to achieve these goals and agreed with the prioritization of focus areas, particularly emphasizing the significant impacts of transportation on water quality in the basin.

Member Laine expressed gratitude for the presentation and raised several points for consideration. Firstly, she suggested re-examining the thresholds for restoration efforts, noting that they have been in place for almost 30 years and may need adjustment to continue progress. Additionally, she highlighted the issue of year-round recreation and emphasized the importance of addressing transportation to trailheads. Laine mentioned challenges such as parking shortages and impacts on residential neighborhoods, urging better outreach and cooperation with entities like the US Forest Service to address these issues effectively. She emphasized the need to accommodate the transportation needs of visitors accessing recreational areas as new access points are developed.

Chair Faustinos commended the proposed goals and emphasized the importance of embedding communication practices consistently throughout their work rather than treating it as a separate goal. She agreed with Member Laine's suggestion regarding the threshold update, noting its relevance to various aspects of the environmental improvement program. Chair Faustinos highlighted the opportunity for comprehensive addressing of issues like aquatic invasive species and watershed stewardship through this update. She encouraged active participation in policy objectives and funding initiatives, suggesting that board members engage in activities supporting legislative opportunities such as the LTRA and appropriations in Nevada and California. Chair Faustinos underscored the importance of leveraging opportunities that align with multiple objectives to maximize support and effectiveness.

Public Comment

Melissa Soderston, Director of Tahoe Forest Matter, voiced objections to logging, sawmills, and biomass initiatives, labeling them as unscientific and polluting non-solutions. She cited numerous peer-reviewed studies, including some funded by USFS and Cal Fire, indicating that thinning is causing harm to forest resilience and contributing to erosion and sediment runoff into the watershed. Ms. Soderston argued that these initiatives do not protect life, property, or infrastructure during extreme fire events. She criticized the terminology of "forest health," suggesting that these projects resemble destructive thinning conducted by commercial logging companies. Ms. Soderston highlighted proposed sawmills and biomass facilities as threats to Tahoe forests, citing concerns about pollution and long-term risks. She urged the committee to prioritize community-wide infrastructure hardening over forest-focused initiatives and to reject biomass proposals of any scale. Ms. Soderston characterized the EIPs as industry mouthpieces and advocated for a shift towards actual land preservation rather than destructive practices. She offered to provide a comprehensive presentation on these issues and thanked the committee for their time.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT, TRANSPORTATION, & PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

Doug Flaherty, representing TahoeCleanAir.org, expressed support for the concerns raised by Tahoe Forest Matter. He highlighted the issue of unmanaged smoke in the Lake Tahoe Basin, emphasizing that agencies often ignore air quality regulations when burning piles. Flaherty expressed concern about the approximately 750,000 slash piles hidden in the Tahoe Basin that have not been managed, questioning how this contributes to environmental improvement.

Committee Member Comments

Ashley Conrad-Saydah appreciated the presentation and discussion. She suggested exploring what the forests of the future might look like under various climate scenarios, considering that certain species may not survive under specific conditions. Ms. Conrad-Saydah emphasized the importance of understanding how human activity influences future forest ecosystems and suggested projections to guide meaningful contributions to forest health, safety, and ecological sustainability. She offered to collaborate on this initiative and expressed interest in learning how to prioritize projects that benefit all stakeholders. Overall, she commended the work done so far and emphasized the importance of collaboration and prioritization for impactful projects.

Brooke Laine appreciated the relevance of both public comments. Regarding projections for future forests and the issue of slash piles, she emphasized the importance of understanding the implications and prioritizing accordingly. Laine shared her observations of large slash piles near healthy trees, expressing concern about the potential fire risk and the need for a clear plan to address them. Referencing past incidents like the Angora Fire, she highlighted the relevance of addressing slash piles to enhance fire prevention efforts. Member Laine indicated a desire to focus on addressing slash piles in addition to other priorities.

Ms. Conrad-Saydah suggested adding a consideration of the public health impacts of catastrophic unmanaged wildfires versus managed prescribed fires. She highlighted the importance of examining these impacts over different time frames, suggesting that existing studies on the topic could be referenced to enhance understanding.

Ms. Caringer expressed satisfaction with the discussion, stating that it aligns with staff priorities for the committee's focus. She appreciated the public comments on forest health, trails, public access, and communication, seeing them as valuable additions to the committee's agenda. Ms. Caringer emphasized the importance of embedding communication practices into TRPA's work and highlighted the significance of the threshold update for project prioritization. She also underscored the need for resource allocation and project implementation, expressing eagerness to collaborate with the committee and involve more partners in discussions about their work.

Presentation: <https://www.trpa.gov/wp-content/uploads/Environmental-Improvement-Program-Committee-Agenda-Item-No-4-EIP-Overview.pdf>

VIII. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT, TRANSPORTATION, & PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMITTEE

January 24, 2024

IX. PUBLIC INTEREST COMMENTS

Robert Larson apologized for raising his hand mistakenly but took the opportunity to commend Kim Caringer and the EIP committee for their work, offering his appreciation.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Laine moved to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Katherine Huston
Paralegal, TRPA

The above meeting was recorded in its entirety. Anyone wishing to listen to the recording may find it at <https://www.TRPA.gov/meeting-materials/>. In addition, written documents submitted at the meeting are available for review. If you require assistance locating this information, please contact the TRPA at (775) 588-4547 or virtualmeetinghelp@TRPA.gov.