



**NEVADA  
COUNTY  
CALIFORNIA**

## Community Development Agency

ComDevAgency@nevadacountyca.gov  
www.nevadacountyca.gov/CDA

950 Maidu Avenue, Suite #170  
PO BOX #599002  
Nevada City, CA 95959

PH: (530) 265-1222 ext. 0  
FAX: (530) 265-9854

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### NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Memo

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**MEETING DATE:** January 29, 2026

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Trisha Tillotson, Community Development Agency (CDA) Director

**SUBJECT:** Recreation Objective for 2026

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Information only.

**FUNDING:** N/A

**BACKGROUND:**

Recreation continues to be a high priority for Nevada County, as identified in the Board of Supervisors' 2025 objectives. These efforts focus on implementing the Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan (RRMP), a comprehensive strategy designed to balance recreation access, sustainability, and economic development while preserving the county's natural beauty and resources. The 2026 presentation to the Board of Supervisors builds upon this momentum, providing updates on current achievements and outlining strategic next steps.

Over the past year, funding has been instrumental in achieving several milestones. Three key sources, the county's general fund, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and grants from California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District have supported critical projects that strengthen infrastructure and enhance visitor experiences.

Highlights include:

- **Outdoor Visitor Safety Fund (OVSF):** A total of \$850,000 was awarded through two rounds of grants, funding 17 diverse projects that go through December 2026. These include wayfinding signage, parking lot improvements, the recreation outpost project, and public safety enhancements.
- **Specific initiatives:** such as the Soda Springs Visitor Center at Van Norden (\$500,000 earmark) reflect the county's commitment to creating safer and more accessible recreational spaces. In November 2025, through an RFP process, Design Workshop was contracted to create the design for the Visitor Center.

- **Grant-Funded Projects:** These projects include the Improvements for Recreation Access at the Government Center, and Enhancing Public Access along Truckee River, both of which align with RRMP goals and demonstrate the power of targeted investment (Total of \$195,000).

The county's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue has grown significantly, approximately 47% between 2019 and 2024, highlighting the critical role of tourism in funding recreation initiatives. For 2026, staff recommends allocating additional funds (such as TOT) to advance ongoing projects and support new initiatives, with specific proposals to be integrated into the FY 2026-27 budget development process.

## **ECONOMIC IMPACT AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:**

### **Economic Impact of Recreation:**

Outdoor recreation remains a cornerstone of economic vitality, contributing \$1.2 trillion to the national economy in 2023 and supporting 5 million jobs. Popular activities such as hiking, bicycling, and snow sports are seeing significant growth, underscoring the value of investments in recreation infrastructure. Locally, the Tahoe National Forest and State Parks, and other regional destinations attract a diverse array of visitors, with economic impacts extending to lodging, retail, and local services.

### **Legislative Support:**

Recent federal actions further underscore the importance of outdoor recreation. The U.S. Senate passed the bipartisan [EXPLORE Act](#) in December 2024, designed to improve access to public lands and provide additional support for the \$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy. In mid - 2025, the Department of the Interior issued a secretarial order to begin implementing the EXPLORE Act. That order established a framework for federal agencies (including Department of the Interior and United States Department of Agriculture) to coordinate execution of the law's provisions, engage partners, and expand recreation opportunities on public lands and waters.

Additionally, California is now moving into implementation of the [Proposition 4 Climate Bond](#), a \$10 billion climate resilience bond approved by voters in November 2024. In FY 2025–26, the state is releasing the first major tranche - approximately \$3–3.5 billion, with a significant share dedicated to parks, outdoor recreation access, climate-resilient park infrastructure, trails, and nature-based solutions. State agencies are currently finalizing guidelines, with recreation-related grant solicitations expected to roll out throughout 2025 and into early 2026, making the next 12–18 months a key window for local governments and partners to compete for funding.

### **Visitor Demographics Informs Strategy:**

Based on visitor demographic data provided by the South Yuba River Citizens League and the Tahoe National Forest—indicating that approximately 88.2% of recreators that were interviewed travel from 25 to 200 miles away—there is a clear need to develop a coordinated strategy in the coming year in partnership with the County's economic development and tourism efforts. This strategy should prioritize informing and educating visitors both before arrival and on-site, not only about outdoor and in-town recreation opportunities, but also about responsible stewardship, safety, and community expectations.

This data further highlights the importance of intentionally shaping a stewardship-based or eco-tourism economy for Nevada County. To do so effectively, the County must first establish a consistent methodology for measuring the economic, environmental, and community impacts of recreation countywide, ensuring future investments, policies, and grant applications are grounded in reliable, defensible data.

## **2025-2026 HIGHLIGHTS AND ONGOING INITIATIVES:**

Building on the successes of 2024-2025 and since the Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan was adopted, several key accomplishments and initiatives are shaping Nevada County's recreation landscape:

1. **Nevada County Convenes:**

- **Pines to Mines Trail Project:** Segment 3 of the Pines to Mines Trail was successfully completed this year, marking a major milestone in the realization of this regionally significant trail corridor. Building on this progress, the Pines to Mines Alliance is preparing for a coordinated 2026 fundraising campaign, while the County is actively facilitating a Wildlife Conservation Board grant application to advance construction of additional trail segments. Throughout the year, the Alliance's Fundraising, Trail Development, and Signage Committees have remained highly engaged, demonstrating strong cross-sector collaboration and sustained momentum toward full trail completion
- **Nevada County Recreation Coalition:** In May 2025, the Nevada County Recreation Coalition successfully launched the County's first Recreation and Adventure Fair, creating a new, highly visible platform to showcase local recreation providers, outdoor businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies. The event strengthened cross-sector connections, elevated public awareness of recreation opportunities countywide, and reinforced recreation's role in community well-being and the local economy. Building on this strong inaugural success, planning is now underway for the 2026 Recreation Fair, with a focus on expanding participation, deepening partnerships, and enhancing the visitor experience.

This year, the County supported the Western Gateway Park District by providing gap funding to enable timely park improvements under a reimbursable state grant. In parallel, the County convened a Parks and Recreation District Conference with district staff to identify shared strengths, surface opportunities, and explore collaborative approaches to addressing service gaps across districts.

The County also facilitated targeted discussions among the Bear River, Oak Tree, and Western Gateway Park Districts to explore alternative governance and coordination strategies. These conversations are ongoing and reflect a continued commitment to strengthening park delivery and regional collaboration.

- **The South Yuba River Visitors Safety Cohort:** From Memorial Day through Labor Day, the South Yuba River Public Safety Cohort convenes weekly, bringing together County departments, state and federal agencies, and nonprofit partners to coordinate actions, align safety and stewardship messaging, and respond to peak-season recreation pressures. This coordinated effort elevates consistent river safety education locally, and in the regions where visitors originate, using a "trickle-up" approach that reaches recreators before arrival and on site, while also supporting the [SYRCL River Ambassador Program](#) to provide direct, on-the-ground visitor engagement.

In parallel, during the year, the Cohort has worked through targeted workgroups to evaluate the South Yuba River Adaptive Management Plan and the River Recreation Management Plan (RRMP), prioritizing projects for advancement to **shovel-ready status** and identifying funding sources now being pursued through coordinated grant applications.

2. **Outdoor Visitor Safety Fund (OVSF):** The OVSF continues to support targeted investments that improve recreation access, enhance visitor safety, and elevate overall visitor experiences across the County.
3. **Grant Funded Projects:** Grant funding is advancing a range of priority initiatives, including expanded wayfinding and safety signage, parking and access improvements, recreation outposts, enhanced river access, and innovative programs such as an employee e-bike fleet pilot to explore sustainable micro-mobility options.
4. **Tourism Support and Economic Development:** New promotional and educational assets have been developed and deployed to strengthen visitor engagement, reinforce

safety and stewardship messaging, and support broader tourism and economic development objectives.

## **PROPOSED DIRECTION:**

To maintain and expand these successes, staff proposes the following key actions for 2026:

- **Recreation Ad Hoc Committee:** Continue the dedicated Recreation Ad Hoc Committee, whose collective leadership has been instrumental in shaping recreation priorities. Their diverse perspectives and countywide purview have provided critical insight into project prioritization, land acquisition opportunities, and strategic funding allocation—ensuring that recreation initiatives align with broader County goals, operational realities, and long-term community benefits.

Consider directing staff and the Ad Hoc Committee to review options for low-intensity camping and bring forward a recommendation to the Board. Additionally, explore renaming the Board Objective to “Recreation Economy” to better reflect the County’s role as a convener and facilitator of recreation opportunities, rather than as a direct provider.

- **Revenue Allocation:** Evaluate and strategically align funding sources, including Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenues with the Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan (RRMP) goals, with proposed allocations reviewed by the 2026–27 Budget Subcommittee and ultimately presented to the Board of Supervisors for consideration and approval
- **Exploring New Funding Sources:** Continue to proactively pursue new grant opportunities, partnerships, and innovative funding mechanisms to sustain existing initiatives and strategically advance emerging recreation priorities.
- **Advocacy:** Advance coordinated advocacy efforts in support of public lands stewardship, recreational access, public safety, and associated resources, in alignment with Board priorities and with guidance from the Ad Hoc Committee, to strengthen policy outcomes and future funding competitiveness.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Nevada County’s recreation initiatives play a vital role in enhancing residents’ quality of life, strengthening the local tourism economy, and protecting the County’s distinctive natural and cultural assets. The accomplishments of the past year reflect strong County leadership, effective stewardship of resources, and a clear commitment to sustainable, community-centered growth. The proposed 2026 objectives and priorities build on this momentum and benefit from the Board’s guidance to ensure continued alignment with Countywide goals.

By receiving the 2026 recreation presentation and providing direction on proposed strategies, the Board has an opportunity to reaffirm its leadership in recreation, economic development, and environmental stewardship—positioning Nevada County as a premier outdoor destination while safeguarding its natural heritage for future generations.

**Item Initiated by:** Shavati Karki-Pearl, Senior Administrative Analyst, Community Development Agency

**Approved by:** Trisha Tillotson, Agency Director, Community Development Agency

## **Attachments:**

- Outdoor Visitor Safety Fund - Executive Summary of Program Impact
- 2025-2026 Recreation Project Updates