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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BOARD AGENDA MEMO

MEETING DATE: August 12, 2025

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Tine Mathiasen, Chief Deputy Clerk of the Board

SUBJECT: Resolution designating the Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants, located in the vicinity of Independence Lake, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-07

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution.

FUNDING: N/A

BACKGROUND: On January 17, 2025, the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission (NCHLC) voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to designate the Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants, located in the vicinity of Independence Lake, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-07. Specifically on November 21, 2024, the NCHLC, with approval of a representative of the current owner of the property on which the proposed plaque for the landmark will be located, Rachel Hutchinson, District Ranger of Sierraville Ranger District, Tahoe National Forest, submitted an application requesting the site of the Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants be considered and designated as a county historical landmark. The Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants are located within the vicinity of Independence Lake, more specifically at USGS 7.5' Quadrangle Independence Lake, CA T18N/R14E, Section 11 as described in the attached supporting document.

As outlined in the attached supporting documents, in 1878, Professor George Davidson of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey undertook a monumental surveying effort across the western United States using a system of triangulation involving major peaks such as Mounts Shasta, Lola, and Helena. Davidson and his team climbed to various summits to prepare for the record-breaking distances involved in their observations. He established a heliotrope and theodolite station on Mount Lola, where on August 1, 1878, he successfully signaled Mount Shasta, 169 miles away, using reflected sunlight from a heliotrope. These landmark observations became a cornerstone of geodetic science, helping to improve the accuracy of mapping and surveying across the western United States. The triangulation method using quadrilateral baselines was state-of-the-art for the time and laid the foundation for modern surveying techniques. The remnants of

Davidson's station, including foundations for the heliotrope, theodolite, and shelter, remain on Mount Lola today in remarkably well-preserved condition. The site was reoccupied in 1924 to measure land displacement following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, further demonstrating its scientific and historical value.

Today, the summit of Mount Lola is a remote and respected destination for hikers and mountain bikers who are typically mindful of the area's historical and environmental importance. Access to the site requires a strenuous journey through the Tahoe National Forest, which helps limit traffic and supports its preservation. Thanks to this responsible user base, the remnants of Davidson's 1878 station have suffered little to no vandalism, retaining their historical integrity over nearly 150 years. Visitors often remark on the solitude and beauty of the site, which adds to its significance as both a cultural and natural landmark. The Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission is working to formally recognize and interpret the site's importance through publications, signage, and online resources. By sharing the story of the Mount Lola Heliotrope Station and promoting awareness of its fragility, the Commission hopes to ensure that future generations can appreciate and protect this unique piece of surveying history.

With this information, there is no doubt that the Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants should be designated as a Nevada County Historical Landmark. Therefore, the Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt the attached Resolution designating the Mount Lola 1870s U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Remnants, located in the vicinity of Independence Lake, as Nevada County Historical Landmark NEV 25-07.

Item Initiated: Carissa Cyr, Senior Management Analyst
Submittal Date: June 9, 2025