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NEVADA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BOARD AGENDA MEMO

MEETING DATE: July 9, 2024

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff / Clerk of the Board

SUBJECT: Presentation of the Nevada County “Collaborative Solutions for Visitor Safety and Outdoor Recreation Management” California State Association of Counties (CSAC) Challenge Award

RECOMMENDATION: Receive the presentation and award by CSAC to Nevada County and its community partners.

FUNDING: N/A

BACKGROUND: Rural Nevada County offers an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. Residents and tourists are drawn to the natural beauty, rural quality of life and access to rivers, lakes, trails, and open spaces. In recent years, a dramatic increase in visitors has strained local resources, creating environmental and safety issues at popular outdoor destinations. There are now over 800,000 annual visitors to the South Yuba River and 2.1 million to surrounding Tahoe National Forest lands. Visitors have been lost or injured in river canyons; excessive trash, human, and pet waste litters once untouched places; and illegal parking and traffic congestion make roadways dangerous and difficult to navigate. Accelerating climate impacts (e.g., extreme weather, wildfire) have increased hazards and the critical need to intercept and educate visitors on safety, preparedness, and responsible recreation.

Seven years ago, the South Yuba River Public Safety Cohort (“Cohort”) was established to identify and implement solutions to these emerging and long-term challenges. Monthly meetings, facilitated by County Staff, provide a forum for discussion, tracking data and trends, project/program development and coordination between the multi-stakeholder working group of public land agencies (BLM, CA State Parks, US Forest Service), CAL FIRE, local and regional fire districts, law enforcement, NGOs, and community representatives. The Cohort addresses issues like access, parking, fire

prevention, emergency response, waste mitigation, visitor education and sustainable recreation. Since its inception, the Cohort has: (1) instituted a Burn Ban Ordinance prohibiting burning on private property within the 39-mile stretch of the South Yuba River; (2) installed 4 emergency call boxes where cell service is limited to non-existent; (3) bolstered support for Trail and River Ambassadors to pick up excessive trash, report incidents, help with first responder coordination and visitor safety education in English and Spanish; (4) increased parking fines, enforcement and signage to reduce hazards like blocking access or wildfire ignition risk; (5) distributed life jackets, maps, and safety information; and (6) secured toilets and waste collection on public and private lands at highly impacted recreation areas. An eastern Nevada County collaborative (the “CCC”) was also formed for Donner Summit and Truckee-related issues, modeled after the Cohort.

In 2022, the Cohort catalyzed adoption of Recreation as a Board of Supervisors Objective with a specific initiative to promote health and safety at river crossings, trailheads and other high-use or high-risk outdoor recreation areas. The Objective was extended into 2023 and 2024. Over \$1,000,000 in ARPA and General Fund dollars was dedicated to (1) increase River and Trail Ambassadors; (2) install new kiosks, trash receptacles and contactless water stations at the South Yuba River State Park; (3) secure additional roadside message signs, toilets and callboxes; (4) develop 39-miles of trail markers and safety signage along the Yuba River corridor; and (5) create public safety videos and materials. The County established the Outdoor Visitor Safety Fund grant program for non-profits, special districts, and businesses to expand capacity and infrastructure; 17 projects and programs were funded that leveraged over \$3 million. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy awarded \$200,000 for Nevada County to develop a Recreation & Resiliency Master Plan to further identify projects and funding to address visitor safety and the outdoor recreation system. Both the CCC and Cohort focused on coordinated messaging to intercept visitors before arriving to outdoor destinations. A Cohort campaign launched prior to Memorial Day 2023 with a river rescue demonstration and press event to reinforce “Stay Out, Stay Alive” messaging and unsafe river conditions. A weekly travel alert was launched on the Go Nevada County tourism site, with material distributed by businesses, lodging, and events. Roadside message boards in English/Spanish alerted visitors of hazardous conditions.

The Cohort, and subsequent efforts, has been innovative in effectively navigating complex issues and systems to provide visitor health and safety solutions. Member contributors provide a unique collection of expertise, creativity, relationships, and know-how that has led to local, state, and federal funding and support.

It is for this reason that CSAC acknowledges Nevada County and its partners with a 2023 Challenge Award for this collaborative program that serves as a model for advocacy, sharing resources, coordinating messaging, and accelerating on-the-ground solutions to mitigate impacts, improve user safety and experiences and enhance rural economies.

ITEM INITIATED: Erika Seward, Senior Management Analyst
APPROVED: Jeffrey Thorsby, Chief of Staff / Clerk of the Board
SUBMITTAL DATE: June 24, 2024