

Staff Report 05

APPLICANT:

Cottonwood Estates Owners Association Inc.

PROPOSED ACTION:

Issuance of a General Lease – Recreational Use.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Sovereign land located in Lake Tahoe, adjacent to 6550 North Lake Boulevard, near Tahoe Vista, Placer County (as shown in Figure 1).

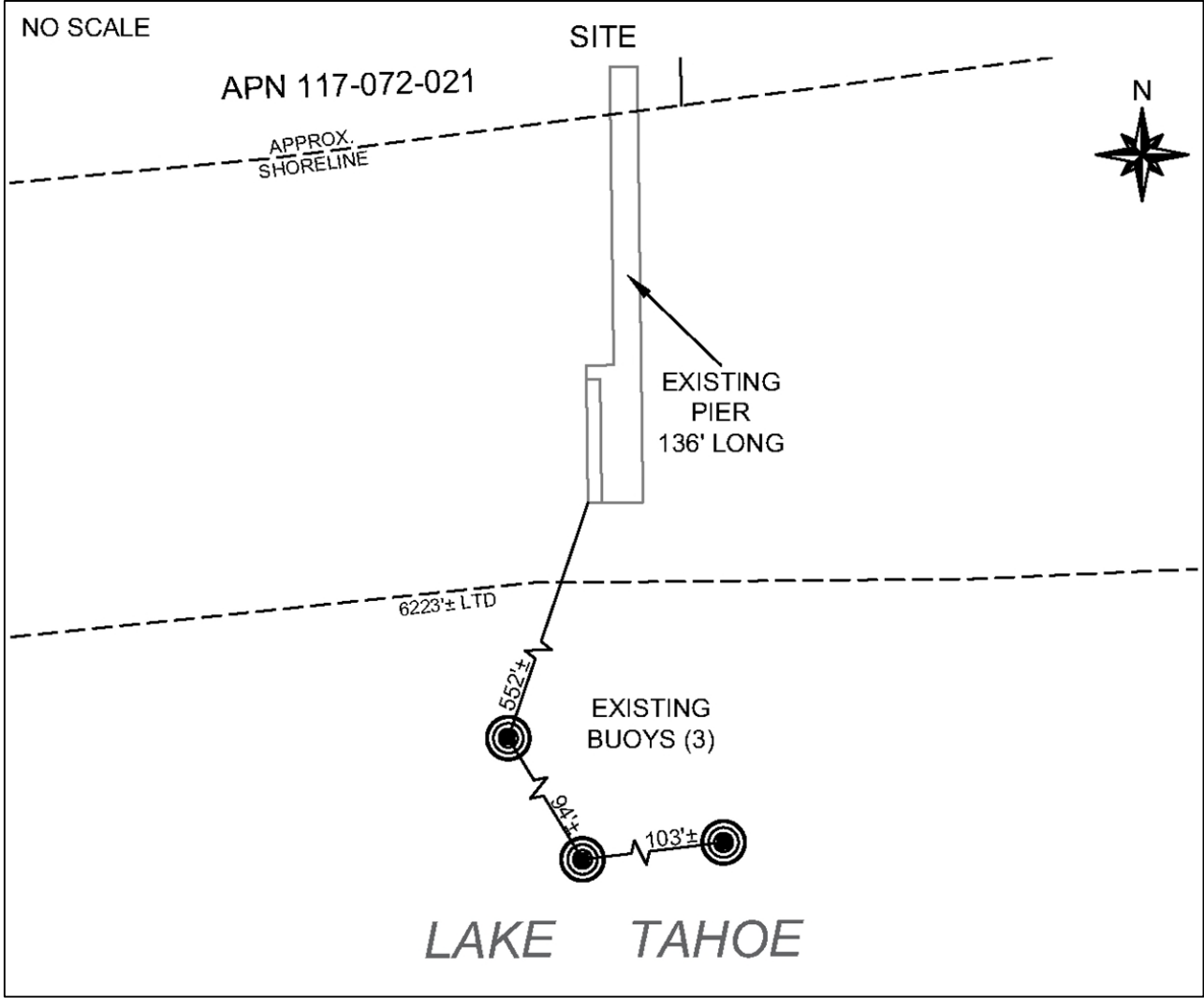
Figure 1. Location Map



AUTHORIZED USE:

Use of three existing mooring buoys (as shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2. Site Map



NOTE: This depiction of the lease premises is based on unverified information provided by the Applicant or other parties and is not a waiver or limitation of any State interest in the subject or any other property.

TERM:

10 years, beginning December 17, 2024.

CONSIDERATION:

\$819 per year, with an annual Consumer Price Index adjustment, and \$1,534 as compensation for the unauthorized occupation of state land for the period prior to December 17, 2024.

SPECIFIC LEASE PROVISIONS:

- Liability insurance in an amount no less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence.
- Lessee expressly acknowledges that a permit or registration from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) may be required for the Authorized Improvements and failure to obtain a permit or registration from TRPA and maintain compliance with that permit or registration may result in TRPA imposing civil penalties and will constitute a breach of this lease.
- Lessee shall not store any personal items or construct any improvements in the Public Trust easement that may impair the public's right of access for navigation, fishing, and Public Trust-consistent recreational uses.
- Lessee shall provide for the use of the mooring buoys by all members of the Association in a fair and equitable manner. Lessee shall provide a copy of Lessee's buoy allotment program, which identifies how the buoys will be managed, maintained, and distributed for use by members no later than 90 days after the execution of the Lease.
- Lessee agrees the provisions of Section 3, Paragraph 11 shall also extend to the period of Lessee's unauthorized occupation of state-owned land, prior to December 17, 2024.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, 6301, 6501.1, 6503, 6503.5, and 6505.5; California Code of regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003.

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

On February 22, 2013, the Commission authorized the issuance of a General Lease – Recreational Use to Cottonwood Estates Owners Association, Inc. ([Item 46, February 22, 2013](#)). The lease expired on January 31, 2023.

The Applicant is applying for a General Lease – Recreational Use for the use of three mooring buoys. On April 27, 2022, the Applicant registered the three mooring buoys with TRPA (Registration No. 10377).

The previous lease qualified for rent-free status pursuant to Public Resources Code section 6503.5 because the application and fees submitted to the Commission for that lease were done prior to March 31, 2011. After that lease expired, the use of the lease premises became subject to monetary rent. As such, staff recommends that the Commission accept compensation in the amount of \$1,534 for the three existing mooring buoys from February 1, 2023, the day after the lease expired through December 16, 2024, the day preceding the proposed new lease. In addition to monetary compensation, the proposed lease will require the Applicant to indemnify the State for the entire period of unauthorized occupation, ensuring the State is protected.

The mooring buoys are located directly lakeward of the upland property and occupy a relatively small area of the lake. The proposed lease does not alienate the State's fee simple interest or permanently impair public rights. The mooring buoys are privately owned and maintained and facilitate recreational boating. Recreational boating is a water-dependent use that is generally consistent with the common law Public Trust Doctrine. The California Legislature has identified private recreational boating facilities as an authorized use of Public Trust land. (Pub. Resources Code, § 6503.5.)

The lease is limited to a 10-year term, does not grant the lessee exclusive rights to the lease premises, and reserves an easement to the public for Public Trust-consistent uses. Upon termination of the lease, the lessee may be required to remove all improvements from State land and restore the lease premises to their original condition. The proposed lease requires the lessee to insure the lease premises and indemnify the State for any liability incurred as a result of the lessee's activities thereon. The lease also requires the payment of annual rent to compensate the people of the State for the occupation of the public land involved.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Climate change significantly affects inland non-tidal lakes such as Lake Tahoe. The frequency and severity of natural disasters like flooding, wildfire, drought, extreme heat, and storms are increasing throughout the state of California, including the Sierra Nevada mountains, and will continue to accelerate through the end of the

century. Structures along the shores of inland lakes are particularly vulnerable to the more frequent and extreme weather events and shifts in seasonal characteristics.

According to [California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment](#), released in 2018, the most significant impacts of climate change in the Sierra Nevada Region are more intense heat, precipitation extremes, declining snowpacks, and changes in streamflow timing. The long-term warming trend will lead to warmer and shorter winters, and longer and drier summers. Successive dry and warm winters are resulting in minimal snowpack, increased winter streamflows and floods, and decreased spring and summer runoff. Prolonged low lake levels will become normal. Low lake level conditions can create more expansive beaches and increased shoreline access in dry months. However, these conditions interfere with boat launching and mooring facilities. This impact is most noticeable where the facilities are sited on shallow, low gradient lake bottom locations.

Dry winters will be punctuated with exceedingly wet years where prolonged and excessive precipitation can produce flash floods. High precipitation in these years will result in higher lake levels, causing beaches to narrow and reducing public access. Extra saturation of the soil can increase erosion, especially following intense wildfire seasons. Surface runoff water may carry more sediment into the lake, adversely impacting water quality and clarity.

Climate change may also lead to more intense and unpredictable storm events and winds. These storms may deviate from prevailing wind patterns for the region. These winds can accelerate shoreline erosion in some areas or cause erosion in areas not typically subject to erosion. Additionally, these winds can increase wave damage on structures and boats along the lake.

Improvements authorized under this lease may require more frequent inspection and maintenance to ensure they are not displaced during storm events. Watercraft moored to buoys, piers, or docks are also vulnerable to high wind events and damaging waves.

CONCLUSION:

For all the reasons above, staff believes the issuance of this lease will not substantially interfere with Public Trust needs at this location, at this time, and for the term of the proposed lease; is consistent with the common law Public Trust Doctrine; and is in the best interests of the State.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. Approval or denial of the application is a discretionary action by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects a use of sovereign land, it exercises legislatively delegated authority and responsibility as trustee of the State's Public Trust lands as authorized by law. If the Commission denies the application, the Applicant may be required to remove the mooring buoys and restore the premises to their original condition. The lessee has no right to a new lease or to renewal of any previous lease.
2. This action is consistent with the "Leading Climate Activism" and "Meeting Evolving Public Trust Needs" Strategic Focus Areas of the Commission's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
3. There is a pier associated adjacent to 6550 North Lake Boulevard, however it does not extend into the Commission's leasing jurisdiction. The lease for the three mooring buoys contains provisions to protect public access at this location.
4. Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a categorically exempt project. The project is exempt under Class 1, Existing Facilities; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15301.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21084 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

CEQA FINDING:

Find that the activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061 as a categorically exempt project, Class 1, Existing Facilities; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15301.

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Find that the proposed lease will not substantially impair the public rights to navigation and fishing or substantially interfere with Public Trust needs and values at

this location, at this time, and for the term of the lease; is consistent with the common law Public Trust Doctrine; and is in the best interests of the State.

AUTHORIZATION:

1. Authorize acceptance of compensation from the Applicant in the amount of \$1,534 for unauthorized occupation of state land for the period prior to December 17, 2024.
2. Authorize issuance of a General Lease – Recreational Use to the Applicant beginning December 17, 2024, for a term of 10 years, for the use of three existing mooring buoys; annual rent in the amount of \$819, with an annual Consumer Price Index adjustment; and liability insurance in an amount no less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence.