

# Tahoe Daily Tribune | lake tahoe action

## LTCC gets grant to develop 1st of its kind forestry program

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The fragility of the Tahoe Basin's economy has perhaps never been more on display than during the ongoing pandemic.

Jobs in the hospitality industry, many of them seasonal and low paying collapsed, and only recently have they begun sputtering back to life.

Kim Carr, a South Lake Tahoe-based consultant doing forestry and climate change work for the past 20 years, has been working on a project that not only will build a more diversified regional workforce, it will create healthier forests.

Her efforts paid off this week with news that the state will award grants totaling close to \$800,000 to develop a forestry degree at Lake Tahoe Community College that will be the first of its kind at a California community college.

LTCC Dean Brad Deeds, who has been overseeing and developing this program, made the announcement recently during a Tahoe Chamber meeting.

That accomplishment was nothing short of a coup at a time when state dollars are being closely guarded.

"Other community colleges in California have forestry programs," said Carr, who has taught in the environmental studies area at the college and was the principal grant writer for the newly created LTCC Forest Health and Job Placement Program. "But their focus is on fire suppression or on supporting the timber industry. Our focus will be on forest restoration and resiliency."

The need for such programs is great, especially in the west, which has suffered massive forest fires and clumsy restoration efforts, according to Andy Lipkis, founder of Tree People, a 37-year old environmental nonprofit organization.

"This is much needed and good news," he said. "The land needs this specialized care and young people need quality jobs which require this kind of training."

Maintaining forests is a dynamic process, especially in an era of extreme climate change he added.

"California employs so many people after the fires start, when we should be increasing soil moisture and reducing runoff and the growth of flashy fuels that can ignite a forest with a spark."

Carr said she was motivated to seek the funding not just because of her concern for forests and the broader ecosystem; she wanted to create a career pathway for people who are passionate about forests. Tahoe is the ideal location for that, she added.

"The greatest threat we face in the Tahoe Basin is wildfire, so having more people knowledgeable and skilled in the field has so many benefits," she said. "The number of fires,

the acres burned, the intensity of these fires and the costs — both in assets and people's lives — are increasing."

And yet while the state has responded by dedicating more dollars to reduce the risk of wildfires by performing tree thinning, prescribed burns and transporting cut biomass out of the forest, they've run into a problem.

"We can't find enough qualified people wanting to do the work," said Carr, who for two years was California State Director of the National Forest Foundation. "Time after time, (state agencies) listed a position and couldn't fill it."

When that happens, they have to contract out the specialized work.

"When work is contracted out, the cost per acre to do the work goes up," Carr said.

"Because there are not enough private contractors, they can bid very high."

A recent study by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protections found that licensed foresters are aging out of the business at a spectacular rate.

There are 1,159 registered professional foresters now, said Carr, and 48% have said they will retire in the next 10 years, at a time they're adding only 25 or so per year.

Carr said the LTCC curriculum is being developed jointly by the college and potential employers of its graduates, including the California Tahoe Conservancy; the US Forest Service; the Tahoe Resource Conservation District and the California Conservation Corps.

"We're facing two major threats in Tahoe: the economic impacts of COVID-19 and the impacts of climate change, especially wildfires," she said. "This program will help address both of those."

Source:<https://www.tahoedailytribune.com/news/ltcc-gets-grant-to-develop-1st-of-its-kind-forestry-program/>